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STEPHEN C. ROWAN AND THE U.S. NAVY: SIXTY YEARS OF SERVICE

by

Cynthia M. Zemke

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

History

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2012

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ABSTRACT

Stephen C. Rowan and the U.S. Navy: Sixty Years of Service

by

Cynthia M. Zemke, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2012

Major Professor: Dr. Denise Conover
Department: History

This thesis is a career biography, and chronicles the life and service of Stephen Clegg Rowan, an officer in the United States Navy, and his role in the larger picture of American naval history. The author has utilized mainly primary sources, including a journal kept by Rowan himself (transcribed from a microfilm copy of a handwritten journal, 900+ pages), and the Official Records of the United States military branches that were kept during the course of the Civil War. Rowan's wartime experiences and the contributions he made during the Second Seminole War, the Mexican War, and the Civil War form the framework of this paper. It also covers the interim periods, during which Rowan participated in other pursuits of the US Navy, including exploration and diplomatic ventures. It concludes with a brief overview of Rowan's accomplishments while serving in the Navy, and his family's continued military service.

This thesis outlines the larger role played by the Navy in each engagement, with particular emphasis on the theaters of war in which Rowan participated (the Californian and Mexican west coast during the Mexican War, and his riverine and coastal services

during the Civil War). It also examines the broader impact and influence that these experiences had on Rowan as an individual and on the navy as a whole.

(202 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Stephen C. Rowan and the U.S. Navy: Sixty Years of Service

by Cynthia M. Zemke, Master of Science

This thesis is a career biography, and chronicles the life and service of Stephen Clegg Rowan, an officer in the United States Navy, and his role in the larger picture of American naval history. The author has utilized mainly primary sources, including a journal kept by Rowan himself (transcribed from a microfilm copy of a handwritten journal, 900+ pages), and the Official Records of the United States military branches that were kept during the course of the Civil War. Rowan's wartime experiences and the contributions he made during the Second Seminole War, the Mexican War, and the Civil War form the framework of this paper. It also covers the interim periods, during which Rowan participated in other pursuits of the US Navy, including exploration and diplomatic ventures. It concludes with a brief overview of Rowan's accomplishments while serving in the Navy, and his family's continued military service.

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Cynthia Zemke

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INTRODUCTION



Fig. 1: Stephen Clegg Rowan, c. July 1862

Stephen Clegg Rowan (Fig. 1) was born on December 25, 1808 in Ireland. His father, John Rowan, and mother immigrated to the United States when Rowan was very young. When he was ten, Rowan followed, and joined his family in Piqua, Ohio, where he was later employed as a clerk in a store. In 1825 he entered Miami University, and on

February 1, 1826, received an appointment as a midshipman in the United States Navy.^{1 2}

Rowan's career in the U.S. Navy spanned many decades. He served in overseas explorations and several military clashes—the most important of which was for the Union Navy during the Civil War. In the post-Civil War period, Rowan advanced up the officer ladder, retiring as Admiral in 1889.

Rowan's naval career, which spanned much of the 19th century, reflected major trends in United States naval history. Rowan, being an immigrant, was like many other foreigners who found opportunities in the military and swelled the Navy's ranks. When Rowan arrived in the United States in 1818, the nation's navy had achieved newfound stability. The War of 1812 (1812-1815) removed the earlier question of whether the US Navy had a meaningful existence. The Navy was a vital branch of the US military, as the future American Civil War would clearly indicate.

In writing this thesis, the author has utilized Rowan's journal as the primary source of Rowan's naval career. Much of Rowan's journal is observations and reflections on places and people, and while he does not write much in his actual journal during the Civil War, his letter book is included in his papers, and it is overflowing with copies of letters that Rowan wrote. Most are official, business-only type letters, but there are a few personal ones included. Owing to space, not everything that Rowan wrote could be included. For instance, much of the information regarding his record of routine blockade duty during the Civil War (trouble keeping the ship supplied, sightings of blockade runners, rumors heard from locals, etc), especially concerning the lengthy blockade of

¹ Stephen Cooper Ayres, "Sketch of the Life and Services of Vice Admiral Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy" (read before the Ohio Commandery of the Loyal Legion, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1910), 1.

Charleston, South Carolina, has been omitted.

The first section of Rowan's journal covers his early naval career, during which he visited many places, and consists primarily of his observations of people and cultures. Being a sailor, Rowan was exposed primarily to port cities, which were not always a complete reflection of a country as a whole. Moreover, he traveled as part of a military force, with the primary objective of furthering US interests abroad. His writings are frequently tinged with the prevailing attitudes of the day, especially in regard to ethics and morality, and this is most obvious in his observations of foreign countries' forms of government. His journal also records weather patterns and the speed and location of ocean currents. Information of this sort dominates the entries while the ship is at sea; as Rowan himself observes, there is not much else to report.

While at sea, Rowan frequently recorded data regarding their specific location. He noted the latitude and longitude once a day, and also wrote down anything of environmental importance, should they be near enough to land to do so—obstacles, the depth of the water, the state of the ocean floor, etc. With the locations recorded, along with other pertinent information, this data could be used to make a future journey less complicated and dangerous. Taken with other records, this information could be used to predict the time it might take to make a specific journey, and the best time of year to make the attempt. An example of this data, and an explanation of it, can be found in the appendix.

THE START OF ROWAN'S NAVAL CAREER

In 1825, Rowan entered Miami University; on February 1, 1826, he received an appointment as midshipman in the United States Navy, owing to the efforts of William McLean, Rowan's Ohio congressional representative who nominated him. Rowan was fortunate to serve in the United States Navy during a period (1815-1860) known as the "Era of Naval Exploration".¹ While exploring the world's geography, the US Navy was also promoting American commercial interests. Often, the US Navy also supported US diplomatic objectives. As Historian Beach has written, the "Navy was both an arm and an avenue of diplomacy."²

From the start of his naval career, Rowan participated in these diplomatic, scientific, military ventures. In August of 1826 he was ordered to the sloop-of-war *Vincennes*, commanded by Commodore Isaac Chauncey, for his (and the vessel's) first cruise, which lasted three years and ten months. On this cruise, the ship became the first of the United States Navy to circumnavigate the globe,³ leaving New York on September 3, 1826, and sailing south around Cape Horn into the Pacific.

Rowan and the crew on the *Vincennes* visited Brazil, Chili, Peru, Tahiti, the Hawaiian Islands, the Philippines, Macau, China, and the Cape of Good Hope. The Americans' first stop was Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Rowan's writing on this city focused on the oppressive form of government, of which he wrote, "The government is that of an

¹ Edward Beach, *The United States Navy: A 200-Year History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987).

² Beach, 156.

³ Stephen Cooper Ayres, "Sketch of the Life and Services of Vice Admiral Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy" (read before the Ohio Commandery of the Loyal Legion, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1910), 1.

absolute monarchy, and the subjects denied the right of trial by Jury, the lives of the subjects at the disposal of the Emperor.”⁴ Rowan described an incident involving an entire regiment being executed on order of the Emperor, owing to their rumored dissatisfaction with the government.⁵ Almost certainly this was a rumor, perpetuated by foreigners desiring to feel morally superior; nonetheless, Brazil at that time was governmentally unstable, having only recently gaining its independence from the imperial power Portugal. Rowan witnessed the results of the local justice system, remarking on the punishments exacted: “For crimes of an inferior kind he [the Emperor] punishes by transportation or chains them together, and compels them under this burthen of chains to carry water from the fountain to the Hospital and keep it well supplied.”⁶ Rowan believed that some offenders were “transported” to penal colonies on the coast of Africa, which Rowan noted to be “worse than death, to be slaves to those who they treated as slaves before captivity.”⁷

During the American stay in the harbor, the Emperor issued an “embargo,” stating that no ships were to enter or leave the harbor. They had been preparing to leave just before this was announced, and the ship was threatened with military action if an attempt was made to leave. Rowan recorded the American reaction: the U.S. Commodore threatened retaliation if any attempt was made to prevent the American departure the

⁴ Private Journal of Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy, Microfilm 180, *Papers of Stephen C. Rowan, August 27, 1826-March 28, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) [hereafter cited as “Rowan Papers, M180”], vol. 1, 10.

⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, 11.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., vol. 1, 11-2.

following morning. Rowan then noted the Brazilian emperor's reversal of the order, at least regarding the American vessels.⁸

The Americans continued their travels, sailing around Cape Horn into the Pacific and then cruising along the western coast of South America. In Valparaiso, Rowan observed that all of the buildings in the town were low to the ground, never over two stories, due to the earthquakes the area frequently experienced. "Last year this Town was visited by an Earthquake which destroy'd upwards of 700 hundred Inhabitants and a proportion of the town."⁹ Rowan wrote that the justice system in the area had improved substantially over the past few years, according to rumor. "Police of Valparaiso is very good at present. Six years ago an American can not walk the streets without risk to be carried by a band of Robbers to some private place and robbed and murdered. Present such crimes are unknown."¹⁰ Despite this, Rowan maintained that the Chilean government required a "complete revolution in the leading persons"¹¹ in order to stabilize.

The Americans visited Valparaiso a second time the following spring, and were there over Easter. Rowan was unsettled by a "religious superstition" of the people there: "On Good Friday they suspend Judis Iscariott [sic] in effigy at all their public places and to the lower yards of their Men of War and at sun down... burn him and sometimes tear him to pieces with yells of revenge and triumph."¹²

⁸ Rowan noted that, "out of compliment to the Emperor," they remained another three days (Rowan, 1.016).

⁹ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 1, 19.

¹⁰ Ibid., vol. 1, 22-23.

¹¹ Ibid., vol. 1, 24.

¹² Ibid., vol. 1, 32.

During their visit to Callao, Peru, on July 14, 1827, Rowan and his shipmates experienced the after-effects of recent political reform:

“This day the Peruvian Congress convened at Lima and, after numerous resolutions, proceeded to elect [sic] a President, Vice President, and other public officers of the government... Since this congress has convened they have passed a resolution ordering all the Columbian [sic] Troops (amounting to 3000) out of the country... (4.037-8).”¹³

The Columbian minister to Peru, noted Rowan, was expected to leave Peru in 24 hours or be treated as a spy. The minister turned to the US commander Jones for protection. Jones first verified that his interference in the matter would not cause tension between the government of Peru and the United States, and once being certain of this, he granted the man protection, accepting him on his vessel, which Rowan does not name, until arrangements could be made to convey him to his native country. Peru had only recently achieved independence from Spain, and Rowan stated that unrest there was commonplace. Also common, observed Rowan, was the poverty of Peru, especially in Callao, where profitable trade was a foreign monopoly.¹⁴

In June of 1828, the *Vincennes* was off the coast of Lima, Peru. While exploring the town, Rowan visited the Basilica Cathedral, and wrote that, even though it had suffered from neglect and robbery due to the revolution, it was still “the finest building I ever saw, the ceiling of which is supported by six pillars is elegantly gilt and ornamented.”¹⁵ He observed in his journal that many of the wealthier families in the area had fallen on hard times and found it difficult to adapt to a more modest lifestyle. It seemed to Rowan that some were willing to go to extreme measures to avoid doing so.

¹³ Ibid., vol. 4, 37-8.

¹⁴ Ibid., vol. 1, 27.

¹⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, 62.

“Nothing can be more shocking to a foreigner than the degraded state of morals of the City of Lima.” Rowan stated that, due to the governmental unrest and the resulting rampant poverty, women of these previously wealthy families were “in the habit of stealing from their houses under cover of night walking the streets until they can fall in with a fellow with a purse sufficiently heavy to attract their attention.” Rowan was told that these women were so adept at disguising themselves, “frequently parents cannot recognize their daughters nor brothers their sisters.”¹⁶ How much of this was hearsay and how much was observed is unclear, but rumors of this nature were certain to be perpetuated by sailors who spent much of their time isolated from members of the opposite gender.

In December of that same year, on their final visit to Lima, Rowan, lured by the novelty of the opportunity, attended a bullfight. Though he was impressed by the agility and skill of the matadors, he wrote, “This is a public amusement which can not be witnessed with pleasure by any refined American, and duly goes to prove the vicious state of society.”¹⁷

The *Vincennes* visited the Marquesas Islands of modern-day French Polynesia, and Rowan was particularly intrigued by the natives of the area. While visiting one of the islands, Rowan went ashore with others from the crew, witnessing a funeral and an accompanying celebration. “The contrast was great between the passive thoughtfulness of those in attendance of the corpse and the gayness of those who were singing songs to

¹⁶ Ibid., vol. 1, 65.

¹⁷ Ibid., vol. 1, 67.

time beat on two cylindrical drums abt. 6 feet high and two feet in diameter.”¹⁸ He described the manner in which the men of the family dressed a number of hogs, while others prepared a pit in which to cook them. They were invited to stay for the meal, but they were compelled to return to the ship before the food was done cooking. He observed with great interest the natives’ “War Dress,” and described a headdress covered in feathers, bracelets made of human hair, necklaces of “small whales teeth,” ear rings, along with spears or clubs and a sling with a small bag of stones, a combination which “constitute[s] a warriors full field dress in which they present a most singular and picturesque appearance.”¹⁹

Rowan was disturbed by the fact that the people of the islands were “acknowledged cannibals,” though they had “laid aside the practice for some time past, except in aggravated cases, such as an individual of a different tribe killing one of their chiefs, or other extreme case.” Still, Rowan noted that “nothing can be more appalling to the mind of civilized man that man’s eating man.”²⁰

They visited other islands in the area, including Tahiti. Rowan wrote that the people of Tahiti and the other Society Islands no longer tattooed themselves as the people of the Marquesas Islands still did, and that the people in general, but especially the women, were taller than those of the other islands. “The women are very large it is not uncommon to see females from 5 feet 10 in to 6 feet in height and well proportioned.”²¹ Rowan was struck by the fact that during all of his exploration of the area and all of his

¹⁸ Ibid., vol. 1, 71-2.

¹⁹ Ibid., vol. 1, 76.

²⁰ Ibid., vol. 1, 77.

²¹ Ibid., vol. 1, 83.

inquiries of the natives, he “was unable to find a person who could tell me his age exactly. There are but few old men or women among them which leads me to believe that but few live to see 50 years; there is but one or two persons on the Island who recollect of Capt. Cook’s first or second visit.”²² Captain James Cook, a British explorer, visited the island several times in the 1770s.

Despite being religious himself, Rowan disapproved of many of the religious influences on the islands. Rowan believed that missionaries to the islands were trying “to cram religion down [the natives’] throats, before there is any evident change in the inward man and no preparation to receive it.”²³ He believed the missionaries focused too much on rectifying what they believed to be deviant behavior, and neglected the spiritual aspects of the faith they were trying to impose on the people. In particular, the missionaries in the area were making attempts to do away with the practice of polygamy among the islanders. Rowan observed that “the influential men disliked to circumscribe their privileges, having been taught from their infancy that a man had a right to keep as many wives as his circumstances would permit, and the poor never gave it a second thought, but consider’d [sic] themselves happy if they could provide for one wife.”²⁴ He stated that though the laws of the area had outlawed the practice, some of the men of higher social standing continued to keep plural wives in secret, unwilling to give up what they believed their status entitled them to.

The *Vincennes* returned to New York on June 8, 1830, and at the end of the summer Rowan was ordered to serve on the revenue cutter *Rush*. For whatever reason,

²² Ibid., vol. 1, 85.

²³ Ibid., vol. 1, 95.

²⁴ Ibid., vol. 1, 90.

Rowan did not write in his journal during this time period, or, if he did, the entries have been lost.

ROWAN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND SEMINOLE WAR

From 1832 to 1836, Stephen C. Rowan served in the West Indies as Passed Midshipman and Master in the Schooner *Shark* and the Sloop of War *Vandalia*. It was during his time on the *Vandalia* that the Second Seminole War broke out. The relationship between the Seminole Indians and the United States had long been troubled, and tensions had been slowly mounting over the past few years, until finally coming to a head on December 28, 1835, when a band of Seminoles attacked Major Frances L. Dade and his detachment of 108 soldiers, killing all but three at the scene of the battle, with only two of the survivors making it back to Fort Brooke, from which they had departed. One of these men, Ransom Clarke, despite a broken arm and collarbone, a wounded leg and a bullet in one of his lungs, managed to elude a Seminole warrior on horseback—the same warrior who tracked and killed one of the other survivors, Edwin DeCourcy—and crawled his way back to Fort Brooke, at last making it on New Year's Eve. The other man who managed to escape, Joseph Sprague, arrived the following day.¹

When word was received of the “Dades Massacre,” the *Vandalia* was in the harbor of Pensacola. According to Rowan, “the *Vandalia* in 24 hours from the receipt of the news had taken in three months of provisions and water and was on her way to Tampa Bay to the relief of our Troops.”² Naval vessels along the coast of Florida were ordered to seek out and engage the hostile Indians, and it was in light of this order that

¹ John and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 7.

² Private Journal of Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy, Microfilm 180, *Papers of Stephen C. Rowan, August 27, 1826-March 28, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) [hereafter cited as “Rowan Papers, M180”], vol. 4, 274.

Rowan, second in command under Lieutenant Levin M. Powell, and Passed Midshipman William M. Walker readied a boat expedition to begin their pursuit.³ The Army, executing an attack on the Seminoles hiding in the swamps, drove the Indians south along the west coast of Florida. Powell and his crew were ordered to cruise the coast, watching for any sign of them attempting to escape the Army, and to engage them if sighted. They spent the day of March 18 patrolling the river Manatee as far upstream as the depth of water would allow their boats, and finding no trace of the Seminoles they proceeded the following day to search the islands near the mouth of the river. They patrolled the area until the morning of March 27, when low provisions and foul weather, combined with the disappointment of a fruitless search and the exposure suffered by over a week in open boats, drove Powell and his men to return to the *Vandalia*.⁴

They were not long on board the *Vandalia*. “Shortly after his return to the ship another boat expedition to Charlotte harbor, consisting of the launch and the boat [Rowan] had commanded before, was organized and he again volunteered to command the Cutter.”⁵ Powell manned the launch, and the two boats, bearing forty officers and men, sailed for Charlotte Harbor. The trip was made on the open sea under sail, Rowan wrote, and it thus required “the greatest care and watchfulness.”⁶ By the time they reached their destination, Rowan had been without sleep for over two days. After camping on one of the islands at the northern end of the harbor, the next morning they headed for Sanibel Island, where the collector of the port resided. Rowan wrote that they

³ George E. Buker, “Lieutenant Levin M. Powell, U.S.N., Pioneer of Riverine Warfare,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Jan., 1969): 254.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁵ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 276.

⁶ *Ibid.*

sighted some canoes, but when they gave chase, their quarry escaped. They spotted a large fire on one of the islands, and shortly after this they spotted another canoe. The people in the canoe saw that they were white, and called out to them in Spanish, telling them they had come from the fishing rancho on Josefa Island. "The refugees reported that on the previous evening their settlement had been attacked by a force of about twenty-five Indians led by Chief Wy-ho-kee."⁷ Rowan wrote that the Indians set fire to the house of the revenue collector, intending to burn him along with his home, but he had escaped.⁸ The Spaniards, whom Rowan stated were all married to Indian women, fled the rancho in canoes, and thus they met up with the men from the *Vandalia*. The women and children were left in the village, because the Spaniards knew the Indians would not harm them, since they were of their own people.

The Spaniards led the sailors to their village, where they learned from the women that the Indians had gone after the collector and his servant, who had escaped in a yacht. "Learning the dangerous position in which the collector was placed Lieut. Rowan called his boat's crew to muster stated the case to them and asked for volunteers to the rescue."⁹ Rowan took a total of twelve men, including at least one of the Spaniards as a guide, and landed at daybreak on an island on which the guide informed them was a number of fishing huts where the Indians might be hiding. On marching into the village, the men were fired upon by the Indians, and they charged into the village, one going to each door of the huts. There were only four Indian warriors in the village, all in one hut, and in the

⁷ Buker, "Powell," 257.

⁸ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 275.

⁹ Ibid., vol. 4, 276.

altercation that followed, two were killed and two were taken prisoner.¹⁰ Rowan, the first to enter the hut, sword in hand, prevented all four of them from simply being shot dead, thinking they could be useful as guides. Of one Seminole warrior, Rowan wrote that “several attempts were made to tie his hands behind his back with silk handkerchiefs, the only thing available, but he broke the handkerchiefs like rotten twine.”¹¹

One of these warriors eventually stated to his captors that a large group of Seminoles had gathered together just inland from Charlotte Harbor. Major General Winfield Scott ordered a regiment of Louisiana Volunteers, commanded by Colonel Persifor F. Smith, to go after them.¹² Lieutenant Rowan landed most of these troops at the mouth of the river, with the intention of ascending the waterway as far as the boats would allow, and then, as per Colonel Smith’s orders, continue on foot.¹³ The columns of men, numbering 500 strong, were led by Rowan with forty of Powell’s sailors as an advance guard, but the going was tediously slow, and when a halt was called at noon, the volunteers refused to go further. Powell, Rowan and their party of sailors continued, along with Smith himself and a few other officers, carrying enough provisions for a week. “Having marched three days into the heart of the country we returned to our boats having seen signs of Indians but encountering none.”¹⁴

The party had found evidence of passing Indians, and a deserted village that had been recently occupied, but no indication that the Seminoles had been amassing in large numbers in the area. Colonel Smith gave the order to return to Tampa Bay, and Powell

¹⁰ Buker, “Powell,” 257.

¹¹ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 277.

¹² Buker, “Powell,” 258.

¹³ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 277-8.

¹⁴ Ibid., vol. 4, 278.

gathered together the Spanish fishermen and their families, numbering around 100 people, and escorted them there. In his report to his Commander, Thomas T. Webb, he writes of the events of the past month, and ends it stating, "We arrived last night after an absence of twenty-six days, and although greatly exposed in our open boats, and my people subjected to much hardship I am pleased to bear witness to the cheerfulness and industry which marked their conduct."¹⁵

The U.S. military ended their winter campaign at the close of April. They considered the climate and environment, especially given the diseases the men were exposed to, too severe to continue campaigning through the summer. The men were dispatched to summer quarters to wait for cooler weather to set in or, in the case of Rowan, until their detachments were ordered. "Our ship returned to Pensacola for supplies and Actg. Lieut. Rowan was detached in May 1836 after a service of nearly 4 years on the West Indian station."¹⁶

Though Rowan was only present in Florida for a brief period of the beginning of the Second Seminole War, he played a key role in the learning experiences of Lieutenant Powell, a man who would later be an authority on riverine warfare in the Everglades. Powell would use his experiences from this part of his service to improve amphibious techniques for use against the Seminoles, and tactics developed during this period would survive to be utilized as far into the future as the Vietnam War.¹⁷ The Navy had experienced riverine warfare during the American Revolution and the War of 1812, but the lessons they learned were ill-suited for adaptation to the Everglades. "The Naval

¹⁵ Buker, "Powell," 260.

¹⁶ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 278.

¹⁷ Buker, "Powell," *passim*.

forces in Florida from 1835 to 1843 found the challenges of Indian warfare and a semi-tropical environment reason to improve on the precedents and implement new tactics that would establish patterns for future riverine warfare.”¹⁸ It was at this time that the Navy first issued every man on the riverine force a printed tactical document covering combat concepts suited to their environment.

Despite these advancements, the swampy territory became an almost insurmountable obstacle throughout the Seminole Wars. The Everglades and the surrounding area was a labyrinth of narrow, twisting waterways and claustrophobic marshes. The experience with the Louisiana Volunteers under Powell and Smith refusing to march any further was an early indicator of the troubles to come. Though the Seminoles were vastly outnumbered and inadequately armed, the swamp became their one overwhelming advantage. The Indians had the ability to disappear into the dense swampland before their opponents could mobilize enough to pursue them, and once on the move, the trail of the hunted was quickly lost in the trackless wilderness. Arduous on foot and at times impassible by boat, the Everglades became the Seminoles’ closest ally, and the U.S. military’s most formidable opponent.

The war stretched into the next decade before it was finally brought to a shaky conclusion. Both of the last two commanders of the war, Walter K. Armistead and William Jenkins Worth, realized the futility of continuing a war in which their opponent was given the entire summer season to rest and rearm, and refused to suspend operations, fighting year-round. They both used every branch of the military and all of the resources

¹⁸ R. Blake Dunnivant, “A Muddy Water Warrior’s Manual: Toward a Riverine Warfare Tactical Doctrine in the Second Seminole War,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 4 (Spring, 2000): 418.

available to them, and finally managed to wear the Seminoles down enough that most of them eventually were either killed or captured, or turned themselves in. In August of 1842, the United States finally, after seven long years, declared the war to be over, at a cost of over 1,500 American lives and over \$30 million—an astounding sum, considering the entire proposed federal budget for 1836 alone was less. Thousands of soldiers from all over the country returned home suffering from diseases and wounds that they never truly recovered from. Despite the high cost of the war, only about 4,000 Seminoles were successfully removed to the reservation out west. A small contingent of Seminoles continued to hold out, hiding in the Everglades and refusing to leave. The Second Seminole War went down in history as the United States' longest, most expensive, and deadliest Indian war, but it was largely forgotten over the next few decades.¹⁹ Despite a third Seminole War that resulted in most of the remaining Indians being killed or removed from Florida, a small number of them, less than 200, remained in the Everglades. Their descendents live there still.

¹⁹ Missall, XV.

ROWAN'S SERVICE BEFORE THE MEXICAN WAR

Rowan was promoted to Lieutenant in the spring of 1836,¹ following his service in the Second Seminole War. He then served from April 1838 to March 1841 on the U.S. National Coast Survey, a duty he did not much care for, “in consequence of the head of our party being a man without system, or firmness to enforce what good ideas he had of order and subordination.”² Though Rowan appreciated the better pay and being closer to the comforts of home, he desired to return to sea. He applied for duty at sea, finished his work on the survey, and reported at the Norfolk Navy Yard for duty on the *Delaware*. This was to be the flagship of Commodore Charles Morris, and to be commanded by Captain Charles Stuart McCauley. They left Norfolk on August 28, 1841, bound for Montevideo and the Mediterranean. Other vessels on the cruise were *Decatur*, *Marion*, *Patomac*, and *Concord*.

Before Rowan had left, his wife, seven months pregnant, had hoped that his orders would not come in before he had a chance to be present for the birth of his child. “In this as well as many other hopes have I been disappointed,”³ Rowan lamented. Once out to sea, however, he had no lack of work to take his mind off what he had left behind.

¹ Stephen Cooper Ayres, “Sketch of the Life and Services of Vice Admiral Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy” (read before the Ohio Commandery of the Loyal Legion, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1910), 1.

² Private Journal of Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy, Microfilm 180, *Papers of Stephen C. Rowan, August 27, 1826-March 28, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) [hereafter cited as “Rowan Papers M180”], vol. 2, 22.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 4.

Commodore Morris ran an efficient fleet. The men were exercised daily in clearing the deck, managing the sails, and manning the guns.⁴

While anchored in the harbor of Rio de Janeiro, on January 14, 1842, the *Delaware* was visited by Dom Pedro II, the sixteen-year-old Emperor of Brazil. The ships in the harbor saluted the royal barge with 21 guns, and he visited each ship in turn. The Americans held a reception ceremony, during which the young emperor expressed a desire to see the guns exercised; Commodore Morris ordered it done, including another 21 gun salute “to gratify the child’s curiosity, never having been on board when guns were fired.”⁵ The young Emperor, whose father had abruptly abdicated in 1831, would eventually become a well-liked leader, and would be referred to as “the Magnanimous.”

By the end of the month, Rowan and the crew were anchored off Montevideo, Uruguay. Rowan, with a few other officers from the vessel, went ashore to explore. They found a tavern with no rooms available, but were told by the owner of the establishment that they were welcome to sleep on the billiard table.⁶ Rowan met Dr. Bryant from the *Decatur*, and they procured horses for a ride in the country. They met a few locals on the road, also mounted, and raced them through the countryside. “There is something in the appearance and manner of life of these men that is fascinating... I was particularly struck with the bold reckless and independent bearing of these people. They

⁴ Rowan wrote in his journal that, “The officers and crew were so thoro’ly exercised in every department of ships duty until the ship was in better order than any one I had ever the honor to sail in (Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 2, 6).”

⁵ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 2, 29.

⁶ Ibid., vol. 2, 49.

make the finest cavalry in the world not excepting the Cossacks.”⁷ The next day, he wrote that the night past was more unpleasant than any other since he had left home.

“I slept on the billiard table...was annoyed to death by fleas and mosquitoes... I rose at 9 more fatigued than when I retired. After a badly served breakfast I paid my bill and prepared to return to my ship with a mental oath that I should never willingly spend an other night in Montevideo (2.056).”⁸

In February, Rowan and the crew encountered an English packet bearing several large bags of mail for the squadron. Despite the rough weather, they sent a boat to collect the bags for their ship. The men anxiously waited on the deck while the packages were sorted out. Rowan was pleased to receive a package and two letters from his wife, who was in “good health and spirits.”⁹

A testimony to Rowan’s patriotism can be found in his February 22 journal entry. He wrote, “The 22nd and the 4th of July are days to be kept sacred, the annals of this or any other country does not furnish two days from which such important results have sprung.”¹⁰ It was customary for vessels in harbors to fire salutes in honor of their holidays, and it was customary for other vessels to return them. They fired a 17-gun salute in honor of George Washington’s birthday, and Rowan noted that the vessels of Brazil, Portugal, and Montevideo all returned the salute, but the French and the British vessels did not. Rowan observed in his diary that the American vessels always honored the holidays of the British and French, and it was poor etiquette for them to neglect to do the same.

⁷ Ibid., vol. 2, 53.

⁸ Ibid., vol. 2, 56.

⁹ Ibid., vol. 2, 66.

¹⁰ Ibid., vol. 2, 67.

On the 2nd of April, Rowan made a thirty-mile ride on horseback to a waterfall above the city of Rio de Janeiro, “thro the most magnificent country eyes ever beheld. Nothing that I have ever seen can compare with the scenery of this country.”¹¹ Rowan particularly enjoyed being on horseback, and he would always avail himself of an opportunity to do enjoy a ride. Of this trip, however, he wrote a few days later, “I paid dearly for my enjoyment. I was so much chafed that I have been confined, under the surgeon’s charge ever since.”¹² Despite this, a little over two weeks later, he could not resist the opportunity to go again, and he and six other men took a ride along the aqueduct and up into the mountains to view the botanical gardens of the city from above.¹³

The Americans left the South American coast for the Mediterranean, and on reaching the strait, they visited the Rock of Gibraltar. The peninsula was impressively fortified, and Rowan and several others of the crew went ashore to explore. Rowan wrote that he was “struck with the military air that pervaded the whole island,”¹⁴ and stated that he passed so many soldiers and sentinels that his hand was in constant motion returning salutes. While along that coast, they also visited Cadiz, of which Rowan stated, “No where are more beautiful women to be found than here.”¹⁵

In Naples he visited several places for the purpose of admiring the architecture and art, including a museum with fresco paintings and other articles taken from Pompeii.

¹¹ Ibid., vol. 2, 83.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., vol. 2, 86-7.

¹⁴ Ibid., vol. 2, 128.

¹⁵ Ibid., vol. 2, 136.

He wrote that the colors looked “as fresh as though they were done but yesterday.”¹⁶

Another section of the museum was devoted to marble statuary; he was particularly impressed with “a Colossal statue of Flora found in the baths of Caracalla at Rome.”¹⁷

The next day, his curiosity stirred by his visit to the museum, he took the opportunity to visit the site of Pompeii with a group of people led by a guide on a tour. They were taken to an excavation site, where work was being done; Rowan noted that they thought roughly a quarter of the city had been excavated.¹⁸ He also wrote of several temples and villas visited, including Nero’s Villa, which had baths with water so hot it “boils an egg in two minutes.”¹⁹

While off the coast of Italy, King Ferdinand II of the Two Sicilies visited the ship, but because he had “previously signified his wish to be received incognito,” they did not fire a salute as he came alongside the vessel. He requested to meet all of the officers, and they were assembled on the deck and introduced. “The yards were manned and a salute fired on his leaving.”²⁰

On the way back to the States, Rowan recorded the event of a court martial held for a seaman and a Marine, who had broken into the Light Room and taken some money. They were both given lashes, the Marine two hundred and the sailor one hundred. The court also ruled that the sailor should be deprived of his pay and “sentenced him to be dismissed from the ship at such a time and place as the Comm’d thought fit.”²¹ Rowan

¹⁶ Ibid., vol. 2, 146.

¹⁷ Ibid., vol. 2, 147.

¹⁸ Ibid., vol. 2, 106.

¹⁹ Ibid., vol. 2, 169.

²⁰ Ibid., vol. 2, 174-5.

²¹ Ibid., vol. 2, 181.

makes no mention of the sailor's further fate. They arrived in Norfolk in March 1844,
after a cruise of almost three years.

ROWAN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE MEXICAN WAR

On the 20th of June, 1845, Rowan received orders to report for duty on the *Marion* for service on the coast of Africa. Rowan requested that he be released from the order, having no desire to serve on that station. His request was granted, and, instead, he was assigned to the *Cyane* (Fig. 2). He enjoyed his remaining time ashore in the company of his wife, and on July 15th he reported at the Navy Yard.¹ The ship, commanded by William M. Mervine, with Rowan as its executive officer, got underway on August 10,² destined for the Pacific Ocean. Very early in the journey, Rowan, wrote,



Fig. 2: *USS Cyane*

“I am on the sea where duty calls me, and trusting in that Divine Providence that guards the fall of a sparrow. I heartily hope to be restored to my country to my

¹ Private Journal of Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy, Microfilm 180, *Papers of Stephen C. Rowan, August 27, 1826-March 28, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) [hereafter cited as “Rowan Papers M180”], vol. 3, 1.

² *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 3.

family and friends and to the embrace of the dear partner of my joys with honor to myself and credit to the Corps of which I am a member.”³

The *Cyane*, along with several other vessels, had been stationed on the west coast of Mexico, in light of the tension between the two countries. War was almost certain, and if it did break out, the Navy would be ready to seize the territory of California. Despite this knowledge, it was impossible for anyone to fathom the impact the coming confrontation would have on this nation and its people, nor could Rowan himself have imagined how it would shape his future.

Mexico, like the United States, had achieved its independence from a European power; but once they had cast off the yoke of Spain, the country dissolved into political chaos. The sudden lack of a clear leader made the government prone to upheaval, and the warring factions seeking to gain control left it vulnerable to hostile takeover.⁴ When Mexico was less than two years old, its very first government was overthrown by the mere threat of violence from Santa Anna.⁵ Between the years of 1836 and 1848, 23 separate administrations had governed Mexico. Several of Mexico’s states, most of them located in the north, objected to and did not recognize their government. Such instability, in the eyes of the United States, was asking for invasion, and they feared that England, France, or another power would take control and use Mexico as a springboard into the United States. They used this as an argument and a justification for essentially doing it first.

³ Ibid., vol. 3, 33.

⁴ Otis A. Singletary, *The Mexican War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 17.

⁵ David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, *The Mexican War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 10.

The United States was also caught up in its imperialist concept of “Manifest Destiny,” the idea that it should—and would—occupy the continent “from sea to shining sea.” This term was coined in July of 1845 by John L. O’Sullivan to justify American expansion as providential.⁶ Tied into this belief that the United States had the right to conquer other territories was the idea that it was also a duty; the liberty- and justice-loving U.S. citizens could bring freedom and democracy to the people of the lands they were going to conquer—people who were suffering under oppressive forms of government. This only thinly veiled the fact that most U.S. citizens had developed the belief that they were superior to the Mexicans in every way. Many believed the Mexicans were mismanaging their land and their resources, and it was the duty of the people of the United States to rectify this problem.

Mexico had allowed citizens of the United States to settle in Texas as a last resort to colonize the territory.⁷ Thousands of settlers poured into Texas, and most of them, once there, refused to abide by the laws and regulations the Mexican government had laid out for them. Mexico had previously banked on the U.S. citizens integrating into Mexican society, but there were too many differences between the cultures for this to happen smoothly, if at all. By the 1830s, over seven thousand Americans had settled in the territory, more than double the population of Mexicans.⁸ Emboldened by their numbers, the U.S. citizens became more and more rebellious, until, desperate to maintain control of the territory, a Mexican army led by Santa Anna crushed U.S. forces in Texas

⁶ John L. O’Sullivan, “Annexation,” *The United States Magazine a Democratic Review*, July/August, 1845.

⁷ Robert A. Doughty and Ira D. Gruber, *American Military History and the Evolution of Warfare in the Western World* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1996), 82.

⁸ Heidler and Heidler, 31.

in several battles.⁹ But Santa Anna met his match in Sam Houston, whose army soundly defeated Santa Anna's in 1836, and the Mexican general was forced to sign a treaty recognizing Texas as an independent state.¹⁰ Mexico justifiably blamed this loss of their territory on the United States.

Mexico refused to recognize the treaty that Santa Anna had signed, claiming that it was invalid because he had signed it while being held as a prisoner of war. The fact that Mexico disputed Texan independence was well known.¹¹ As a result, when Texas accepted an annexation offer from the United States in 1845, Mexico, holding that the States had accepted territory that rightfully belonged to them, severed diplomatic relations with the United States.

When the war with Mexico broke out in April 1846, it was over this land dispute regarding the territory of Texas, but the United States saw no reason to not include California in the argument as well. While achieving and maintaining Texas was one of the main goals for the United States, it was also a means to an end. President James K. Polk of the United States had won the vote on an annexation platform, promising the Westward-looking American people that he would secure for them Texas and other territory.¹² While Texas was indeed a prize he sought to gain, he was also looking still farther west. Equally important to him, and perhaps even more so, was the goal of California, whose ports would give the United States easy access to the Pacific without having to sail around Cape Horn. Through the shipping businesses based in New

⁹ Ibid., 35-6.

¹⁰ Ibid., 37.

¹¹ Doughty and Gruber, 82.

¹² Jack K. Bauer, *The Mexican War: 1846-1848* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 7.

England, the United States had already tasted the fruits of Chinese trade, and was keen to tap into it further.¹³

Adding to the eagerness of the U.S. to take California was the activity of the British Navy in the Pacific. Fear that the British would take California before they had the opportunity encouraged the United States to action. Andrew Jackson, in 1835, had offered Mexico half a million dollars for the port of San Francisco, but they had vehemently declined—the idea of selling any of their territory to the United States was abhorrent to them. Polk’s original goal was to “acquire California by infiltration and subversion,”¹⁴ much the way the United States had taken Texas. When it became clear that the United States would not get California without a fight, however, Polk switched gears and went for a more aggressive approach. He did not seem to much care how he acquired California, as long as he did.

Enthusiasm to take California had even led U.S. Navy Commodore Thomas ap Catesby Jones to preemptively seize the port of Monterey, then the capital of California, in 1842 and claim California as United States territory after the rumor that war had broken out between the nations reached him.¹⁵ Commodore Jones was relieved from his duty in 1843, only to be reinstated to the same post after the end of the actual war. At the time, apologies from the U.S. government were only grudgingly accepted, and Mexico saw the action for what it foreshadowed: the United States wanted California, and they would achieve it any way they could.

¹³ Doughty and Gruber, 83.

¹⁴ Jack K. Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines: U.S. Naval Operations in the Mexican War, 1846-1848* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1969), 137.

¹⁵ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 13.

The East coast of Mexico was blockaded in short order at the outbreak of the war, with Commodore David Conner effectively securing the ports of Matamoros, Tampico, Alvarado, and Veracruz. Throughout the course of the war, no Mexican vessel would be able to put to sea under Conner's watchful eye.¹⁶ The West coast took a little longer to secure. Mexican California consisted of two separate parts: the Baja peninsula and upper, or Alta, California. Alta California was what the United States was after, and unfortunately for Mexico, it seemed inevitable that it would fall. The territory was distant enough from the Mexican capital that the government's control over it was weak, and this coupled with its location on the coast meant that many foreigners had settled there regardless of Mexico's claims to it. The population before the outbreak of the war was about twenty-five thousand, and only a small percentage of that number was loyal to the Mexican government.¹⁷ Mexico had soldiers garrisoned at several of the key ports, including Monterey, San Francisco, San Diego and Santa Barbara, but they would prove little match for the onslaught of the U.S. Navy.

The *Cyane* arrived at Mazatlan in January 1846, and joined several other American vessels in the harbor. They remained there for thirty days, conducting needed maintenance and repairs and supplying the ship with provisions and water for six months.¹⁸ On February 22, Commodore John D. Sloat, Commander of the Pacific Squadron, sent the *Cyane* to Monterey, bearing Lieutenant Archibald H. Gillespie of the United States Marine Corps. Gillespie had arrived at Mazatlan on the 9th of that same

¹⁶ Jack Sweetman, *American Naval History* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2002), 46.

¹⁷ Heidler and Heidler, 48.

¹⁸ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 18

month, bearing dispatches for Captain John C. Fremont.¹⁹ Gillespie said very little about what information the dispatches contained, only that it was urgent, and that he must be given passage to California as quickly as possible. The English Navy had several ships in the area, due to the tension between the United States and Britain regarding the territory of Oregon, and they were watching all with keen interest. In light of this, Sloat sent the *Cyane* to take Gillespie to Monterey, but “to blind [the English] as to the destination of the *Cyane* she was ordered to touch at the Sandwich Islands en route.”²⁰

In the Pacific, the United States Navy was at an extreme disadvantage in comparison to the squadron in the Atlantic. While supplies in limited quantities could be purchased from the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) and along the Mexican coast, many of them had to come from South America or from the eastern United States. Orders, also, had to make the long and arduous journey from Washington. Messages and supplies alike had to travel all the way around the southern tip of South America, or else be carried across Panama. Either way, it was a trip of some four to six months. To ship anything overland could have taken even longer and would have been more costly. This meant that the Navy in the Pacific was largely on its own when it came to orders—news traveled far too slowly to wait for direct orders in regard to action that needed to be taken. The matter of naval stores was an even more pressing one. By the end of January 1847, many of the ships were down to less than two weeks’ worth of salt provisions a man, and most of the men were without shoes. Chaplain Walter Colton, the alcalde of California, wrote in February that, “Our ships, as far as sea-service is concerned, are of about as

¹⁹ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 166.

²⁰ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 279.

much use as so many nautical pictures. They look stately and brave, as they ride at anchor in our bay; but let them go to sea, and they would carry famine with them. It is a strange policy that keeps a squadron on this coast in such a disabled condition. One would suppose the Department had concluded men could live at sea on moonshine.”²¹

Due to the distance between Mazatlan and Hawaii, and from there to Monterey, it was not until April 17 that the *Cyane* reached her destination in California. By that time, Fremont, who had been at Monterey shortly before, had already departed from the area, headed for Oregon.²² Fremont had left the California territory before Gillespie caught up to him.

The *Cyane* remained in the bay at Monterey through July, expecting daily to hear news of the outbreak of war and orders to take the town and raise the American flag. Commodore Sloat, who had said he would be close behind the *Cyane* when they left Mazatlan, did not arrive at Monterey until July 2nd, and once there, he hesitated another five days before making a move.²³

Rowan’s reflections on the area and the people are telling. Monterey, despite the fact that it was regarded as the capital of California at the time, was a small port and offered little in regard to supplies. Rowan, expressing the attitude of many Americans, wrote in his journal that, “This however will no longer be the case when industrious people get possession of the soil and commerce and demand increases.”²⁴ The Californians, or the “Calafornios,” as the people living in the territory were referred to by

²¹ Walter Colton, *Three Years in California* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1850), 183.

²² Bauer, *Mexican War*, 166.

²³ Rowan Papers, M180, 4, 279.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 22.

many, were a conglomeration of people of mixed Mexican and Spanish decent and a collection of foreigners from across the globe—including Americans—who had settled on the California coast. The territory of Alta California was far from its seat of government, and was, for the most part, largely indifferent to Mexican authorities, and, as was frequently the case, even rebellious against them—except when it served their purpose. Of this land and these people, Rowan wrote in his journal: “This country is nominally attached to Mexico and is under Mexican laws when the laws are executed or there is power in the civil or Military department to enforce them. Mexico has sent troops and Generals to Calafornia (sic) repeatedly to protect them from the Indians and to assist the civil authority but the instant the native Calafornians think themselves secure from Indian depredations they commence intriguing to rid the country of the Mexican Gov't and his troops.”²⁵

The American Consul, Thomas O. Larkin, who was then residing in Monterey, believed that California was anxious to sever its ties with Mexico and to rid itself completely of interference from its government, and that the Californians would soon declare themselves independent from Mexico and ask the United States for protection against their former government. Despite the fact that Rowan believed that the Californians had no real respect for the authority of the Mexican government over them, he wrote in his journal, “I doubt his conclusions while at the same time I am under the impression that emigrants from our country will shortly revolutionize the country and erect themselves into an independent republic and in course of time “Annex” themselves

²⁵ Ibid., vol. 3, 22-23.

as did Texas.”²⁶

Rowan was certainly not the only person who recognized this distinction. There were already many American emigrants in the territory, and they were not above stirring up trouble. Many men of the Navy looked on them as rabble-rousers, and some were of the opinion that if it had not been for these troublemakers, there might have been a peaceful resolution to the conflict between the United States and Mexico over the question of California. Rowan certainly believed they were not doing their country any credit, and called them “insurgents.” Captain John C. Fremont, who was the head of a party exploring the area, was himself a bit of a rabble-rouser, and was instrumental in stirring up the “Bear Flag Revolt” in Sonoma. Far from being a “California” uprising, the “Bear Flaggers” were a small group of mostly American foreigners, who took it upon themselves to declare California’s independence from Mexico on the 4th of July in 1846. Some weeks before, the same group of men had attacked Sonoma in the middle of the night and captured the Mexican General Mariano Vallejo and two other Mexican officers and held them for some weeks at Sutter’s Fort. Rowan portrayed these men in a very unfavorable light: “Not a man of these conspirators had been in the Country over twelve months, and because the Mexican government did not permit them to take real estate from its legitimate owners and appropriate it to their own uses a cry of persecution is raised and they take up arms and hoist an independent Flag with a ‘Bear and Star’ on a white field edged with red.”²⁷ The revolt received little local support. A few days later news regarding the outbreak of the war reached the area, and the new flag was pulled

²⁶ Ibid., vol. 3, 25.

²⁷ Ibid., vol. 3, 6-7.

down and the American Flag was raised in its place.

Despite all of the rumors, there had been no official confirmation of war from Washington. Commodore Sloat was a cautious officer, and hesitated much longer than most officers would have before taking action. His hesitancy was born of thirty years of what basically amounted to peacetime service, and of his fear of being formally reprimanded as Jones had been for his preemptive seizure of Monterey—the same port his ship was then anchored off the coast of. Having been given the orders to preserve the peace until war was unmistakable, Sloat was naturally wary of acting prematurely. News that Fremont had been engaging in skirmishes inland had reached the Commodore, however, and he assumed that the other officer must know something he did not. Using the assumption that Fremont was under orders that justified the initiation of military action, Sloat ordered the town be taken.

On July 7, 1846, Captain Mervine of the *Cyane* landed a party consisting of 140 seamen and 85 Marines and took Monterey without any opposition from the Mexican forces stationed there.²⁸ Lieutenant Stephen C. Rowan was among them, and he was immediately ordered to put up earthworks, and a blockhouse and stockade to house 100 troops. This was done, under Rowan's direction, by the sailors from the *Cyane*, and despite not having much experience with such enterprises, it was done satisfactorily and in short order.²⁹ Rowan would remember this work with pride decades later: "The successful accomplishment of this piece of field engineering so exceptional in the experience of a naval officer was a source of pride to him as long as he lived and he

²⁸ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 170.

²⁹ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 280.

referred to it with much satisfaction.”³⁰

Two days later, Commander John B. Montgomery of the sloop *Portsmouth* landed a party and took both San Francisco and Yerba Buena. They too were unopposed.³¹ It appeared that many of the inhabitants of Alta California did not care much which country their territory “belonged” to, provided their own personal interests were preserved. On the same day, Lieutenant Joseph W. Revere, also of the *Portsmouth*, left Monterey and rode to deliver American flags to Sonoma and Sutter’s Fort, and to inform Fremont of the seizure of Monterey.³²

Commodore Robert F. Stockton arrived at Monterey in the *Congress* on July 15th, and was greeted with relief by Sloat, who intended to hand over command of the squadron to him in the near future.³³ Four days later, Fremont and his men rode into town. Bauer notes that their arrival was cause for alarm, since the state of their clothing and hair, combined with the manner in which they were armed, “gave them the appearance of savages.”³⁴ Rowan referred to them as a “gang of outlaws,”³⁵ and noted that they had been “filibustering”³⁶ in the area.

Sloat and Fremont met immediately upon the latter’s arrival, and Sloat was horrified to learn that Fremont was under no instruction from Washington to initiate

³⁰ Stephen Cooper Ayres, “Sketch of the Life and Services of Vice Admiral Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy” (read before the Ohio Commandery of the Loyal Legion, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1910), 4.

³¹ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 22-23.

³² Bauer, *Mexican War*, 171.

³³ *Ibid.*, 172.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 28.

³⁶ Historic definition: to engage in unauthorized warfare against a foreign country.

hostilities.³⁷ Though President Polk had signed the declaration of war almost two months before on the 13th of May, official news of that momentous occasion had still not reached the Pacific coast. Soon after this event, Sloat relinquished his position and headed for home. His failing health, combined with the stress of the situation in the Pacific, was more than he cared to bear. He gave the command of land operations to Stockton on the 23rd of July, though he did not transfer the entire command to him until the 29th, on which date he sailed for home.”³⁸

Stockton wasted no time picking up where Sloat left off, and he did so with much more enthusiasm—and much less tact—than his predecessor. On the 25th of July, he ordered Commander Samuel F. Du Pont to take Fremont and his men to San Diego in the *Cyane*.³⁹ Rowan wrote that the goal was “to seize horses and mount [Fremont’s] men and make a diversion in favor of a movement to be made by the Commodore from San Pedro to capture Los Angeles (sic) the Capital.”⁴⁰ Upon their arrival, Du Pont sent Rowan at the head of a group of sailors and marines from the ship to the town. Rowan marched the men the five miles to San Diego, which they entered unopposed;⁴¹ the town was secure before Fremont’s men were even ashore.

On August 4, 1846, Santa Barbara was taken by a landing party from the U.S. frigate *Congress*, flagship of the Pacific Squadron, under Commander Samuel F. Du Pont.⁴² Two days later, First Lieutenant Jacob Zeilin from the same ship led a group of

³⁷ Bauer, *Surfboats*, 159.

³⁸ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 173.

³⁹ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 28.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 280.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 29.

⁴² Bauer, *Mexican War*, 174.

marines to San Pedro and occupied it. Both cities were taken without resistance.

From San Pedro, Stockton landed a naval brigade of 360 men with the intent of capturing Los Angeles.⁴³ The situation was a unique one; the Commodore was preparing to lead a large-scale land campaign with a force made up almost in its entirety of sailors. “Only 90 of his 360 men carried muskets: the others carried carbines, pistols, swords, and boarding pikes—a sorry collection of weapons with which to fight the Californians’ favorite weapon, the cavalry lance.”⁴⁴ The other American forces were in a similar situation.

On August 7th, the Mexican commander at Los Angeles, General Castro, sent Captain Jose Maria Flores and Pablo de la Guerra with a message to Stockton at San Pedro asking for a negotiation. Stockton replied that he would not negotiate with Castro until California had declared itself independent of Mexico and under American protection. This would have left Castro with nothing to negotiate for, and so, overestimating the American force and recognizing his own limitations, he decided to flee California, “but, to cover his flight, on 10 August he wrote Stockton a letter announcing that, in view of Stockton’s ‘insidious’ response to his request for a conference, he would fight.”⁴⁵

Prepared to meet him in battle, Stockton and his force marched on Los Angeles on August 13th, but took it with no opposition.⁴⁶ Fremont and his battalion of California volunteers arrived once again too late to see any action. They had taken a separate route,

⁴³ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 29.

⁴⁴ Bauer, *Surfboats*, 167.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

and arrived only an hour after Commodore Stockton had taken the city. Du Pont had been ordered to bring the *Cyane* up the coast and join them, but due to the lack of wind, they were unable to arrive in time. Rowan wrote that by the time they arrived, “Stockton had quiet possession of the Capitol.” Rowan was shocked that Castro had not stood his ground, and called him a coward for running away. Rowan and the men of the *Cyane*, however, had been under the impression that Castro had been “at the head of six or seven hundred Calafornians,”⁴⁷ when in reality his army had dwindled to only about one hundred men.⁴⁸

The day after Los Angeles was taken, the Mexican forces in California surrendered; California was under the control of the United States.⁴⁹ This string of easy victories must have lulled the U.S. Navy into a false sense of security. Stockton in particular had a low opinion of the Californians, and this led him to make several bad judgment calls about them, including underestimating their ability to reorganize and execute an effective counterattack. Whether or not Stockton believed that maintaining control of their captured targets would be as easy as taking them had been, the Mexicans did not stay down for long, and little more than a month later, California rose in revolt.

During the interim, the Navy turned its eyes south. While small forces were left behind to hold their captured ports, the Navy sent ships south to attempt to take the rest of the Mexican west coast.⁵⁰ On August 19th, Stockton proclaimed the west coast of Mexico to be under blockade. Stockton, however, did not have enough ships to proclaim a legal

⁴⁷ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 29.

⁴⁸ Bauer, *Surfboats*, 168.

⁴⁹ Sweetman, 47.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

blockade, and the ships he did have were undermanned and undersupplied.⁵¹ A few days later, Rowan wrote that “the *Cyane* and the *Warren* were ordered down to promulgate Stockton’s celebrated paper blockade.”⁵² The *Cyane* was sent to San Blas and the *Warren* to Mazatlan. On the way to San Blas, the *Cyane* intercepted two small Mexican vessels, a sloop called the *Solita* and a brigantine called *Susana*, and captured them. Du Pont deemed the former fit to preserve, and sent it to La Paz, but had the *Susana* scuttled.⁵³ The *Warren*, on the way to Mazatlan under Captain Hull, captured another vessel, this one a brig called the *Malek Adhel*. Bauer notes that Lieutenant William Radford and sixty-nine men were ordered by Hull to take the vessel while her Mexican crew was at siesta, and that they “had boarded the brig and fastened her hatches before her snoozing crew realized what was going on.”⁵⁴ The ship was taken into U.S. service and was manned by the Navy.⁵⁵

The *Cyane* continued to San Blas, a small port south of Mazatlan, which despite its size was heavily equipped with 34 cannon.⁵⁶ On September 2, a landing party led by Lieutenant Rowan rendered these cannon useless by spiking them,⁵⁷ an act of sabotage accomplished by driving a spike into the touchhole, the vent in the breech used to ignite the powder inside. After the action at San Blas, the *Cyane* sailed north up the Gulf of California toward La Paz, Rowan wrote, “in hopes of Capturing the Mexican Schooner

⁵¹ Bauer, *Surfboats*, 170.

⁵² Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 29.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 30.

⁵⁴ Bauer, *Surfboats*, 172.

⁵⁵ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 344.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Sweetman, 47.

Julia.”⁵⁸ The *Julia* was indeed in the harbor at La Paz, and Rowan, accompanied by Lieutenant George L. Selden, captured the vessel with the launch from the *Cyane*. There were eight other vessels in the harbor also, and all were captured by the crew of the *Cyane*.

Du Pont, having learned that there was a Mexican gunboat further up the Gulf of California, pressed northward, intent on declaring the blockade to other ports in the area. They anchored “off the Church Mission of Loretto (sic),”⁵⁹ and Rowan was sent ashore to inquire there if anyone had seen the Mexican gunboat. Rowan wrote that they learned that there were in fact two gunboats, the *Anahuac* and the *Sonorense*, and that “they were either at Muleje or Guaymas.”⁶⁰ After checking at Muleje and finding nothing, they headed for the port of Guaymas, which they reached around sunset. “We saw some troops of the line drawn down and evidently much excitement amongst the people; the women and children all fled and lined the faces of the surrounding hills. We found both Gun Boats in the harbour, one was dismantled and hauled up on the beach, the other was partially so.”⁶¹

The next morning, Rowan went ashore with a flag of truce to meet with the Mexican commandant, carrying a letter from Du Pont which demanded the surrender of the gunboats, and threatened to fire on the town if the demand was not met. A message was sent to Du Pont the next day from the Mexican commander, “stating that he could

⁵⁸ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 30.

⁵⁹ Ibid., vol. 3, 31.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

not with honor as a soldier give up the Boats.⁶² Several people on shore had requested of Du Pont some time to remove their property from the area so that it would not be damaged by fire from the *Cyane*. Rowan wrote that “Our gallant Captain gave them one hour and no more,”⁶³ but soon after they were given this answer, the *Cyane* was fired upon by the town. The guns from the town were silenced by those of the ship, and a small crew was sent in to fire the two gunboats. Du Pont sent another message ashore, stating that the town would be left alone if he was not further provoked, and they were quiet for the rest of the *Cyane*’s stay in the harbor.

Soon after this, Du Pont sailed for Mazatlan, where they remained into the month of November. They had expected a store ship from New York to bring them supplies, but no such vessel had been sighted. Rowan wrote that despite this they remained at Mazatlan until “we were reduced to 8 ounces of bread dust and that destroyed by weavels (sic), with a corresponding short allowance of other parts of the ration and only forty days at this reduced rate and fifty days water.”⁶⁴ The average passage from Mazatlan to San Francisco, the nearest port at which they could expect to be supplied, was thirty days. It was with this in mind that Du Pont reluctantly raised the blockade in the Gulf of California and sailed for San Blas, where they hoped to meet the *Portsmouth*. Finding no other American ships there, they returned to Mazatlan, where they learned from a French Corvette that had sailed from San Francisco that the American forces stationed at Los Angeles had capitulated to the Mexicans.⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid., vol. 3, 32.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., vol. 3, 34.

⁶⁵ Ibid., vol. 3, 35.

Du Pont assumed that this uprising was the reason for the lack of supplies, and decided to continue to San Francisco. They stopped in San Jose, where they met an American merchant who had been run out of Mazatlan, who informed them that “the people of Lower Calafornia were friendly and would supply us with fresh Beef and Vegetables.”⁶⁶ They accepted the offer gratefully, and once they had taken on fresh water and food enough for ten days, they continued on to San Francisco.

To the north in Upper California, Jose Maria Flores, a captain in the Mexican army, had collected a band of native Californians and led them in a revolt against the occupational forces of the United States in September. The U.S. forces were small in number and scattered along the coast, due both to Stockton’s underestimation of Mexican zeal and strength and to a lack of manpower. Los Angeles, which would prove one of the most difficult cities to maintain control of, was the site of the first battle between Mexican and U.S. forces during the revolt. Captain Flores clashed with Lieutenant Archibald H. Gillespie of the United States Marine Corp, who had been ordered to hold the city with a 48-man garrison from the battalion of Californian volunteers led by Fremont.⁶⁷ Gillespie was left with no option but surrender, but Flores allowed Gillespie and his men to withdraw a few days later. The city of Santa Barbara was also abandoned by the U.S. forces soon after Los Angeles fell.

Historian K. Jack Bauer blames the loss of Los Angeles on Stockton: “his policy of stationing small garrisons in the midst of highly inflammable, recently conquered, and

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 184.

disgruntled populations was as unwise psychologically as it was militarily.”⁶⁸ This blunder was due as much to a lack of manpower than anything else, but it pales in comparison to the accusation that follows it. Stockton’s choice of Gillespie, an officer with a reputation for being overbearing and completely lacking in diplomacy, to head the troops left there was “inexcusable,” and the choice of men to leave under his control even more so. “Had Stockton garrisoned Los Angeles with Marines or sailors, however poorly they might have been suited to the task, there would not have been the friction that the strutting and drunken Bear Flaggers created.”⁶⁹

The first attempt to retake Los Angeles failed miserably. Captain William Mervine, who had come from San Pedro with 225 men from the frigate *Savannah* when he heard of the revolt in Los Angeles, joined forces with Gillespie and made an attempt on the city. They were repelled by a cavalry force that was equipped with a cannon—a luxury that Mervine and Gillespie did not enjoy.⁷⁰ Rowan states that Mervine was aware of the fact that the Mexican forces were equipped with artillery, and made a conscious decision to not take any of his own. The officers asked him to take a field piece, but he refused, saying, “We will surround their artillery and take it.”⁷¹ The Mexican forces, being mounted, were much more mobile than the Americans, however, and in the end Mervine’s men were so harangued by the cavalry that they turned back. Rowan states that as soon as he was back on his ship, “off he went with his tail between his legs like a

⁶⁸ Bauer, *Surfboats*, 176.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 184.

⁷¹ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 36.

well whipped dog.”⁷² He wrote that he believed Mervine was a brave man, but lacked common sense. A few days later, the *Congress* arrived, bearing Commodore Stockton, who was so displeased with Mervine’s conduct “that he ordered him to San Francisco to prepare for home.”⁷³

After having such an easy time capturing Los Angeles the first time around, the ease with which the U.S. troops were driven back by the Mexicans shocked them. The next attack on the city would not be so assuming. Commodore Stockton planned an attack on Los Angeles that would bring the United States forces down on her from two directions. Fremont, at the head of his battalion, moved south from Santa Barbara while Stockton moved north from San Diego. Accompanying his naval brigade was also a force led by Colonel Steven W. Kearny, which had marched overland all the way from Kansas. Together, the force amounted to over 600 men, and was equipped with four cannon. Lieutenant Rowan, who had marched 110 men from the *Cyane* inland to join their forces, was appointed acting Major of the battalion of sailors and Marines that made up a large part of the force.⁷⁴

The Californians under Flores at Los Angeles numbered 450 men, and had two cannon in their possession. Flores sent a messenger to Stockton, bearing a letter in which he signed himself “Commander in Chief and Governor of Calafornia” and demanding that Stockton withdraw from the field. Rowan wrote that the letter also stated that “he and his troops would be buried in the ruins of their country sooner than submit to the

⁷² Ibid., vol. 3, 38.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., vol. 4, 281.

tyranny of the agents of the United States.”⁷⁵ The Commodore replied with his own message, “denouncing Flores as a rebel in arms and that if he caught him he would shoot him, promising at the same time pardon to all others who came in and delivered up their arms and promised to be quiet in the future.”⁷⁶ Flores made no reply, and both forces readied themselves for what would be one of the most decisive battles during the war in California,⁷⁷ the Battle of San Gabriel, which took place on January 8, 1847.

Flores had intended to intercept Stockton’s force at La Jaborneria Ford on the San Gabriel River, but scouts sent out by the Commodore discovered their planned ambush, and they moved to cross at Bartolo Ford instead.⁷⁸ Flores discovered their plan quickly, however, and the Mexican cavalry were in place to meet them before they even began to cross. He placed his field pieces on some hills overlooking the river, spread his cavalry out, and waited.

The American forces were formed in a hollow square, Rowan noted, with the baggage, and ammunition wagons and livestock inside, a formation Rowan called a “Yankee Corral.”⁷⁹ Flores made an attempt to break the formation, but it failed.⁸⁰ He also directed his artillery to fire on the Americans as they prepared to cross the river. Had their ammunition been better, this could have been devastating, but their powder was of poor quality and their cannonballs even worse—most of them did not even fit the

⁷⁵ Ibid., vol. 4, 313.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Heidler and Heidler, 104.

⁷⁸ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 190.

⁷⁹ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 48.

⁸⁰ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 190.

barrels of the guns.⁸¹

As the Americans neared the river, they noted the positions of the enemy's forces, and Stockton made the somewhat rash decision to ford the river despite Flores' advantageous position. Stockton ordered Rowan to "bring a company from the rear for the purpose of dragging our artillery across,"⁸² and then Stockton ordered the entire force across the river without arranging any covering fire.⁸³ Despite the sandy river bottom (and the lack of horses, requiring the men haul the guns) and the enemy fire, the first guns were quickly across and were brought to bear on Flores' forces on the hills. "One of the enemy's guns was soon disabled and their fire appeared to slacken...two other pieces were added to our park which compelled the enemy to withdraw their artillery to avoid losing them."⁸⁴

Once the whole force was across, it advanced in formation onto the plain. Flores' cavalry attacked from two directions, Rowan wrote, but the formation held, and Stockton, who was commanding the guns, drove them back with the heat of his fire. Flores was driven from his vantage point by the American riflemen, and Stockton ordered the force forward to take the position.⁸⁵ Flores attempted a few more half-hearted attacks on the American force's flanks, but eventually withdrew toward Los Angeles.

Rowan wrote with pride of the steadiness of the men, despite the heavy enemy fire and the repeated cavalry charges. He also noted that "between the columns of the main body we had 16 ox carts, four oxen in each, 40 pack mules and 200 head of cattle,

⁸¹ Bauer, *Surfboats*, 194.

⁸² Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 314.

⁸³ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 191.

⁸⁴ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 314-5.

⁸⁵ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 191.

and we did not allow one to escape.”⁸⁶ The Americans, Rowan continued, camped that night on the position Flores had held as they forded the river.

Stockton’s battle-plan, despite its success, showed his lack of tactical experience on land. He was a naval commander, and he had little experience leading land assaults. His force was primarily one of sailors who were also more accustomed to war at sea. The casualties suffered by the American side numbered only two killed and nine wounded, but given the situation it could have been far worse. Bauer cites his decision to force his way across the river in the face of the enemy as his greatest mistake, due to the fact that his men were incapable of returning fire until they were all the way across, leaving them vulnerable. “Had the Californians been able to deliver accurate fire, they could have wrought havoc among the American infantry as it forded the river.”⁸⁷ To his credit, however, Rowan maintained that Stockton himself had waded into the water and had helped to drag their artillery across the ford.⁸⁸

The following day, the Battle of La Mesa took place, named for the plain on which it was fought. Though Flores had lost few men at the battle the day before, many had since deserted.⁸⁹ Stockton advanced his men across the plain, choosing to have his men parallel the main road instead of marching on it. A ravine ran along the plain, and Flores had positioned his army to take full advantage of it. He had his artillery spaced out along the ravine, and when Stockton’s force was within range, they opened fire. “At 10 OC AM the enemy appeared on our right, and soon opened three pieces of artillery on

⁸⁶ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 315.

⁸⁷ Bauer, *Surfboats*, 196.

⁸⁸ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 315.

⁸⁹ Bauer, *Surfboats*, 196.

us from different position in gulches. This fire retarded our movements very much, and as fast as we dislodged the enemy from one position he would by means of his fine horses gallop off with his cannon and place it in other desirable positions.”⁹⁰

They continued to press forward, driving Flores back as they went, returning fire as they were able. Flores ordered his artillery to take up a position across the road as Stockton’s force approached, and concentrated his fire on the front of the square. Stockton called for a halt, and positioned his own guns forward in response, and kept up a heavy fire until Flores was forced to retreat about fifteen minutes later.⁹¹ At that point, Flores was almost completely out of powder, rendering his guns useless, and ordered a cavalry attack on the square, but Stockton suffered no such lack of firepower, and dispersed the charge when they were within eighty yards.⁹² Recognizing the futility of continued resistance, Flores retreated. Stockton’s force camped that night in full view of Los Angeles.⁹³

During the Battle of La Mesa there was only one death among the American forces, and five wounded, one of whom was Rowan, who was caught across his right shoulder blade by a musket ball.⁹⁴ The wound disabled his arm for about a week, and he was fully recovered within a few weeks without having gone off duty.⁹⁵

The following morning, as they approached Los Angeles, a rider met them from the town bearing a flag of truce, and said they were prepared to surrender if Stockton

⁹⁰ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 49.

⁹¹ Bauer, *Surfboats*, 198.

⁹² Ibid..

⁹³ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 316.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., vol. 3, 282.

would give his word that their lives would be spared and their property unharmed.⁹⁶

Stockton accepted the terms and the American forces again occupied Los Angeles, and “with his own hands, Gillespie raised over the Government House the flag he had hauled down when he surrendered almost four months previously.”⁹⁷ Three days later, what remained of Flores’ army came upon Fremont’s forces as the latter rode, once again too late to help, to Los Angeles.

The Treaty of Cahuenga was drawn up between the parties and signed by representatives from both the United States and the defeated Californians.⁹⁸ Though the treaty’s terms were virtually identical to ones that Stockton had earlier refused, and the treaty itself could have legally been declared unbinding, Stockton and Kearney had no choice but to honor it, since by the time word of it reached them its conditions were already being put into practice by the Californians. Regardless of the treaty’s somewhat abnormal origins, the war in Alta California was over—and the United States had won.

Soon after this, the difficulties between Commodore Stockton and General Kearney, which had been previously concealed by the need to cooperate, became unmistakable. They quarreled over who was in supreme command, with Stockton claiming he had been longer on that station and had established the civil government, and Kearney claiming his express orders from Washington overruled all else.⁹⁹ In the end, Kearney decided to leave Los Angeles and headed for Monterey, leaving Stockton in charge in Los Angeles. Just before Kearney left, Stockton asked Rowan if he would

⁹⁶ Ibid., vol. 3, 50.

⁹⁷ Bauer, *Surfboats*, 199.

⁹⁸ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 193.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 194.

travel back to the United States overland as a bearer of dispatches, and, “believing it to be service of importance combined with novelty and adventure as well as attended with some danger, I thoughtlessly accepted.”¹⁰⁰ He was to accompany the infamous Kit Carson, and would depart from San Diego.

Rowan regretted his agreement, however, when Stockton then ordered the *Cyane* to take General Kearney to Monterey, and Rowan was left behind. “The day the *Cyane* left I never regretted any act of my life more than the hasty step I had taken in leaving a ship where my association was of the most agreeable kind and a commander who is the most agreeable gentleman I have ever been associated with. I felt deep melancholy when the little *Cyane* disappeared.”¹⁰¹

The trip overland was delayed, and Rowan, having reconsidered, asked Stockton to withdraw his orders to head back to the states overland, and return him to the *Cyane*. Stockton granted the request, and a replacement for him was easily found. Rowan remained in San Diego until May “without being able to communicate with Capt. Du Pont or learn whether my situation in the *Cyane* had been permanently filled or not.”¹⁰² Soon after Stockton revoked his orders, Commander W. Bradford Shubrick arrived with orders to relieve Stockton. In May, Shubrick sent for Rowan and asked him if he would bear dispatches from San Diego to Commodore James Biddle in Monterey.¹⁰³ Rowan quickly accepted, hoping to reunite with his crew from the *Cyane*.

Shubrick gave him the necessary documents, and Rowan left on May 13, 1847.

¹⁰⁰ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 53.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., vol. 3, 54.

¹⁰² Ibid., vol. 3, 55.

¹⁰³ Ibid., vol. 3, 63.

Rowan overtook a party at the Mission of San Buenaventura which was also headed for Monterey and which included Lieutenant Colonel Fremont, and they traveled most of the rest of the way together.¹⁰⁴ The day they were to have reached Monterey, they stopped for a late breakfast at a mission farm some 45 miles from their destination, and Fremont decided to remain there until the next day.¹⁰⁵ Rowan desired to reach the port as soon as possible however, and so he left Fremont and his party early in the afternoon and pressed on. “After very hard riding I found myself on the wharf in Monterey half an hour before sun down. I took advantage of the first boat and went on board the Flag Ship *Columbus*, Commodore Biddle, who received me in his cabin and having read my dispatches, we entered into conversation, he took me for a Volunteer officer.”¹⁰⁶ The date was May 19; Rowan had made the journey from Point Lomas, outside of San Diego, to Monterey—a journey of 650 miles—in seven days. This was accomplished by relaying his mounts. Horses were plentiful along the coast of California, and the Californians were friendly to travelers. Whenever his mount began to flag, he would trade it for a fresh one.

Biddle assigned Rowan to temporary service on the *Warren* under Captain Hale until the *Cyane* returned to Monterey. “I found the *Warren* in the most dilapidated state, but succeeded in putting her in better trim in a short time.”¹⁰⁷ He was thus engaged when Stockton arrived and, having decided to return to the states overland himself, he applied to Biddle to take Rowan with him. Biddle granted the request, but rescinded when he

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., vol. 3, 66.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., vol. 3, 71.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., vol. 3, 72.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., vol. 3, 73.

learned of Rowan's desire to rejoin the *Cyane*.¹⁰⁸ The *Cyane* anchored in the harbor of Monterey on July 27, and the following day Rowan rejoined his vessel.¹⁰⁹

Though they had effectively lost both Texas and California, Mexico was not about to admit defeat. Upper California had capitulated, but not so Baja. Though Stockton had taken measures to ensure that the peninsula was included in the blockade, it had otherwise been virtually ignored by the U.S. Navy. Now, with Alta California defeated, Stockton turned his eye on the peninsula. Though he was relieved by Shubrick before he could put any plans into play, Shubrick continued naval operations along the coast. On February 17, 1847, he sent the *Portsmouth* to reestablish the blockade of the Mexican coast at Mazatlan.¹¹⁰ On March 30, the port of San Jose del Cabo was occupied by Lieutenant Benjamin F. B. Hunter and a landing party from the sloop *Portsmouth* consisting of 140 men. The men from the *Portsmouth* then sent a marine detachment to occupy the village of San Lucas on April 3, and Lieutenant John S. Missroon led a landing party north to take La Paz, the capital of Baja California, on April 13.¹¹¹

Later that same month, the *Cyane* and her crew returned to their duties on the blockade in the Gulf of California. They were stationed at the mouth of the Gulf, sailing back and forth between Mazatlan and San Jose del Cabo, and for some months, the *Cyane* was the only vessel on blockade in that area.¹¹²

Action in Baja was limited for the next few months, but the U.S. struck again at the beginning of October. On the first of the month, Lieutenant T.A.M. Craven and a

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., vol. 3, 74.

¹¹⁰ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 344.

¹¹¹ Sweetman, 49.

¹¹² Bauer, *Mexican War*, 345.

party of 50 men landed from the sloop Dale, commanded by Thomas O. Selfridge, and occupied the village of Muleje, which held a Mexican garrison. Four days later, Craven and his landing party seized three cannon and other arms and ammunition from the village of Loreto.¹¹³

In an effort to strengthen the American foothold in the area, on November 4 Shubrick announced the intention of the United States to keep the territory of Baja California once the war was over. As a result, many Mexican citizens cooperated with American forces. When the war was over and the United States made no claim on Baja, many of these people were force from their homes and had to flee to the United States.¹¹⁴

Later that same month, Mazatlan, Mexico's most important and powerful western port, fell to the United States. Captain Elie A.F. La Vallette of the *Congress* led a landing party consisting of men from his own ship, those of the *Independence*, and of the *Cyane*, altogether amounting to 730 men, into the Pacific port. Rowan, under the command of Du Pont, helped land a field piece from the *Cyane* and commanded the left wing of their company.¹¹⁵ The combined force occupied Mazatlan without much trouble.¹¹⁶

Though the city remained in U.S. hands for the duration of the war, multiple skirmishes occurred near it. Lieutenants Stephen C. Rowan and George L. Selden landed parties near Urias, about ten miles south of Mazatlan, just before dawn on November 20.

¹¹³ Sweetman, 51.

¹¹⁴ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 347.

¹¹⁵ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 77.

¹¹⁶ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 347.

Rowan's party landed within one hundred yards of the enemy's sentinels,¹¹⁷ and together the two parties attacked and defeated the Mexican company in Urias at first light.¹¹⁸ A little less than a month later, on December 12, Lieutenant Montgomery Lewis attacked and dispersed another band of Mexicans just after nightfall. The very next day, the last engagement in the area occurred when Lieutenant William W. Russell, leading a patrol of 20 marines, came upon a group of Mexicans at Palos Prietos and scattered them.¹¹⁹

On the same day that Mazatlan fell, Captain Manuel Pineda of the Mexican army headed a revolt in Baja. He and his men attempted an assault on the garrison at La Paz, but were unsuccessful. They attempted again less than a week later, but were once more repelled. On the 19th, after their two failed attempts on La Paz, Pineda turned his forces south and attacked San Jose del Cabo. A garrison of U.S. marines commanded by Lieutenant Charles Heywood had been stationed there barely ten days before by Shubrick, just before he left to move on Mazatlan. They were besieged by Pineda and his men in a mission compound, and most likely would have been compelled to surrender, had it not been for two whaling ships that were sighted on the horizon by the Mexicans.¹²⁰ They incorrectly assumed the vessels were U.S. warships coming to relieve Heywood and his men, and retreated.

Pineda again attacked San Jose del Cabo the following January. Though Heywood's forces had been supplemented by the addition of almost thirty more men, the

¹¹⁷ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 78.

¹¹⁸ Sweetman, 52.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 348.

attacking Mexicans were still able to lay siege to the garrison a second time¹²¹. It was not until mid February that the siege was lifted, when Commander Du Pont, aboard the *Cyane*, arrived with reinforcements. They arrived too late in the day to land their forces, but they lowered their boats and armed them during the night, and at daylight the next day Du Pont landed a party of 110 men, under the immediate command of Lieutenant Rowan, at daybreak. They marched the better part of a mile before the enemy opened fire on them, but, Rowan notes, they were “concealed on the chaparral and sugar fields and overshot us in [their] desire to avoid exposure.”¹²² As they neared the garrison, Lieutenant Heywood at the head of about thirty of his men came to meet them, and after the enemy had withdrawn, “the two little forces united to exchange congratulations.”¹²³ Rowan wrote that when they arrived, the supplies of the besieged men had dwindled to a scant eight days’ worth, and that Heywood had begun to make preparations for destroying anything of military value preparatory for a surrender.¹²⁴

Very little resistance was offered to American forces on the west coast after these events. The *Cyane* continued in her duties on the blockade, awaiting news of the end of the war. At the beginning of May, Rowan wrote, “Kept our water filled and provisions full in hopes that we should receive orders from home. Our men’s times s expiring daily, but as yet not a murmur has escaped them.”¹²⁵ The war had technically been over for months, but word had not yet reached the Pacific Squadron. It was not until early June, while the *Cyane* was off San Blas, that they finally received news of the end of the war

¹²¹ Ibid., 349.

¹²² Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 283.

¹²³ Ibid., vol. 3, 82.

¹²⁴ Ibid., vol. 3, 83.

¹²⁵ Ibid., vol. 3, 90-1.

and were ordered home.¹²⁶

At the beginning of February, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was ratified by the United States Senate. On March 10, representatives for both the United States and Mexico signed the treaty in a village outside of Mexico City.¹²⁷ Mexico recognized the boundary of the U.S.-Mexico border as the Rio Grande, conceding Texas as United States territory. In addition to this, however, the treaty also ceded to the U.S. a substantial amount of territory outside of Texas, including all of what is now California, Arizona, Nevada, and Utah, plus parts of New Mexico, Colorado and Wyoming. The United States was required by the treaty to pay Mexico fifteen million dollars—an amount they had once offered Mexico for California alone—and agreed to forgive all financial claims of American citizens against the Mexican government. Historian Otis A. Singletary notes that many people at the time (many still do) referred to this as “conscience money,” and stated that it “seemed to confirm the ugliest charges of those who had denounced the war as a cynical, calculated despoiling of the Mexican state, a greedy land-grab from a neighbor too weak to defend herself.”¹²⁸

In a war that was arguably unprovoked, the United States had acquired nearly half of one of its neighbor’s territory, adding greatly to its own “empire.” In its bid to lay claim to enough land to satisfy—at least temporarily—its desire to “manifest its destiny,” the United States had waged a war against a country that it should have been able to sympathize with. After casting off the yoke of Spain, Mexico was in a situation comparable to that of the States only a few decades before. The United States, however,

¹²⁶ Ibid., vol. 3, 94.

¹²⁷ Bauer, *Mexican War*, 384.

¹²⁸ Singletary, 5.

was intent on preserving its own interests, and that included acquiring the fertile lands of Texas and the Pacific ports of California. Though opposition to the war was voiced within its own capital, the war garnered enough support that it was fought almost entirely with volunteers.

The United States acquired a little more than they had bargained for, however. The question of whether or not slavery would be legalized in the new territory was one that had political factions at one another's throats. This new dimension to an already bitter argument would serve only to accelerate the inevitable end of civil war. Ulysses S. Grant, who fought in both the Mexican and the Civil Wars, characterized the former as "one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation,"¹²⁹ and viewed the latter as a kind of divine retribution for it. "Nations, like individuals, are punished for their transgressions. We got our punishment in the most sanguinary and expensive war of modern time."¹³⁰

The role of the U.S. Navy in the Mexican-American War is often downplayed, sidelined in favor of Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott. Most schoolchildren will at least recognize the name of Santa Anna, but how many would recognize Robert F. Stockton's or David Conner's? Numerous historians have claimed that the Navy's role in the war was negligible, and that the United States could have won the war even had the Navy done nothing. A closer look at the role the Navy did play, however, reveals it to be of great value. While there is no way to prove that it was integral, it is certainly clear that the Navy helped the US to a speedier victory than it otherwise would have had. At the

¹²⁹ Ulysses S. Grant; McFeely, William S. and Mary D. (editors), *Ulysses S. Grant: Memoirs and Selected Letters* (New York: Library of America, 1990), 41.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

very beginning of the war—before, in fact—the Navy was ready to move on Mexico.

Very quickly after the outbreak of war, the Navy had blockaded most of the important ports on the East coast, and the West coast also soon fell under its advance. In addition to preventing the Mexicans from using their ships to transport troops and supplies, the Navy also participated in the war on land, joining forces with the Marines and the Army. Much of the action that took place along the west coast and in inland California was fought primarily by naval forces, despite their lack of experience and expertise in such campaigns. It would have been much easier for Mexico to field a sizable army against the U.S. forces in Texas had it not been fighting battles along its coasts, and men and supplies would have been much easier to move from place to place had not their ports been blockaded. California could very likely not have been a part of the equation at all at the end of the war, had not the Navy played such a vital role in securing the ports along the length of her coast. The Navy also helped the small army contingent in its engagements inland—aid that was sorely needed. The capture of so many cities—Monterey, San Francisco, San Diego, Mazatlan—along the western coasts of California and other Mexican territories, not to mention the role the Navy played in the Gulf of Mexico, should not be overlooked so easily.

By the time Rowan returned from the Mexican War, he had spent the past two decades in the service of the Navy, almost all at sea. After the Mexican War, starting in February 1849, Rowan's career took a new direction. He served as the Assistant Inspector at the Navy Yard in New York for three years. The US Navy during the period between the War of 1812's end and the Mexican War's conclusion had experienced not only the age of geographical exploration but also the era of technological innovations.

Owing to the Industrial Revolution, technological change was the order of the day.

Steam and more powerful armaments were but two advances which would shape the US Navy in the years before (and during) the American Civil War.

In little more than a decade after the Mexican War, the consequence of the US defeat of Mexico—annexing nearly one half of Mexico—would lead to bitter regional conflict. But until the momentous events of 1860-1861 divided the country, Rowan continued his travels abroad. In 1854, Rowan sailed on the *Relief* to Rio de Janeiro twice. His journal entries are reduced to record keeping regarding the weather and the state of the current, along with details on specific location, giving latitude and longitude. Having had previous experiences on the same route, he made observations on the best route to take at specific times of the year. On reaching Brazil on the first trip, he wrote in his notes that they “anchored in Rio de Janeiro in 46 days from New York, which was considered a fine passage for so dull a ship as the *Relief*.”¹³¹

Upon their return to New York, he was granted leave and hastened to Fort Wayne, Indiana, to be with his wife, who was pregnant. He arrived there in early April, worried that he would be called back for service before the birth of his child “but thank God I was there and all went well and she is now the happy mother of a fine Boy.”¹³² His wife gave birth on the 25th to their first and only child, a son they named Hamilton, after having had three miscarriages. Less than a week later, Rowan received orders to return to New York, and he left his wife and son on May 2nd, to make another trip to Rio. He ceased to write in his journal until the beginning of the Civil War.

¹³¹ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 108.

¹³² *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 121.

THE BEGINNING OF THE CIVIL WAR

At the beginning of the Civil War, the United States Navy was not in any position to enforce a blockade the likes of which President Lincoln very quickly declared. In March of 1861, the navy had only 90 ships, most of which were in laid up in the Navy Yards, unserviceable, or serving as receiving ships. Only 42 were actually in commission. Of these, nineteen were wooden sailing vessels, relying solely on wind power, and some were very old—more than a few had served in the War of 1812. The 23 remaining were steamers. Thirty of the ships in commission were showing the flag in foreign waters, scattered across the globe in Africa, Asia, and South America. Four were off the coast of Florida, one confined to the waters of the Great Lakes. Of the seven remaining, only four were in Northern waters at the outbreak of the war, three at New York and one at Washington.¹ When Lincoln declared a blockade to be in place on the Confederacy, the South—and the nations of Europe—justifiably responded with scorn. The rebellious states had a coastline of over 3,500 miles; it would have been impossible even if all of the Navy's ships had been available.

Most of the officers were long past their prime, moving up through the ranks with a system that based promotions on seniority—if a man served long enough, he was promoted whether he was a good officer or not. Resources were limited; consequently officers, instead of working together for the greater good of the service, were more often than not pitted against one another, seeking to fulfill their own agendas, which unfortunately were frequently more about personal promotion than anything else.

¹ Spencer C. Tucker, *Blue and Gray Navies: The Civil War Afloat* (Annapolis: US Naval Institute Press, 2006), 30.

Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, would encounter many obstacles in his endeavor to provide Lincoln with the Navy the President needed. Conflicting commands and presidential orders caused confusion and delay in the opening phase of the conflict, as seen in the events leading up to the firing on Fort Sumter.

The lack of vessels was rectified much more quickly than anyone thought possible; several ships were called home from foreign service, and the ones that were having work done on them in the navy yards were quickly turned out, including five modern steam frigates, all less than a decade old, which were among the most powerful vessels in the world. These included the USS *Minnesota*, which mounted 47 guns. "In the war's first months, anything that could float, move, and carry a cannon without capsizing was bought and pressed into service: yachts, Staten Island ferry boats, tugs, fishing craft, whalers, even garbage scows."² The strange conglomeration of vessels may have appeared a bit ridiculous, but it served its purpose.

When Abraham Lincoln was elected to be President of the United States on November 6, 1860, Rowan wrote in his journal of the sentiments in the South, and noted that many states were on the verge of seceding from the Union because of Lincoln's stance as an abolitionist.³ In the months leading up to the outbreak of the Civil War, many officers from Southern states requested positions on foreign waters;

"That class of officers who at such a time sought duties in the Pacific and on foreign stations were considered, *prima facie*, as in sympathy with the

² William R. Trotter, *Ironclads and Columbiads: The Coast (The Civil War in North Carolina)* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 1991), 29.

³ Private Journal of Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy, Microfilm 180, *Papers of Stephen C. Rowan, August 27, 1826-March 28, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) [hereafter cited as "Rowan Papers M180"], vol. 3, 129.

Secessionists, but yet not prepared to give up their commissions and abandon the Government. No men were more fully aware that a conflict was impending, and that, if hostilities commenced and they were within the call of the Department, they would be required to participate. Hence a disposition to evade an unpleasant dilemma by going away was not misunderstood.”⁴

Rowan feared that war was inevitable, and desired to serve his country if it came to that. Thus, on January 8, 1861, Rowan wrote to Welles, requesting to be considered for sea service, and specifically for the command of the USS *Pawnee* (Fig. 3), whose previous commander had applied to be relieved.⁵ Welles granted him the command of the *Pawnee* and ordered him to the Navy Yard at Philadelphia to report to Captain Du Pont for command of that ship. Rowan wrote to Welles on Jan 18, reporting his arrival at the Navy Yard. Owing to the concern that Southerners might attempt to prevent

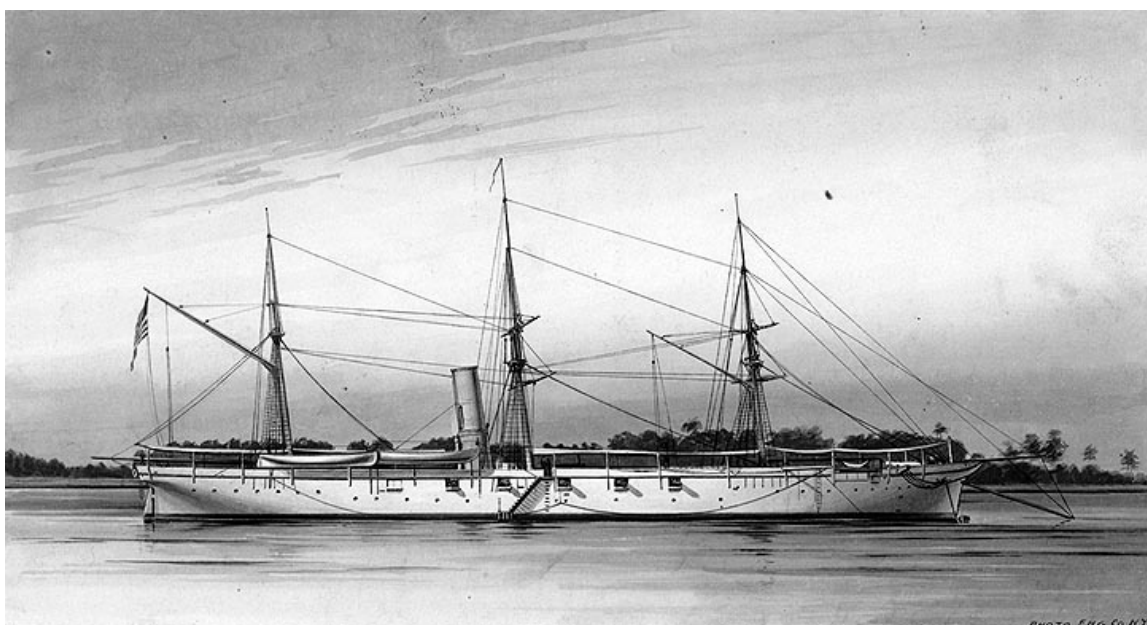


Fig 3: USS *Pawnee*

⁴ Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson, Volume 1* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 19-20.

⁵ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 8.

Lincoln's inauguration, plans were made to have at least one vessel on hand at the Washington Navy Yard for the ceremony.⁶ Rowan was selected to perform this duty.⁷

Welles wasted no time in scraping together resources for his Navy. He was competing with other branches of government and the military for funds and supplies, and often butting heads with the Secretary of State, William Seward. Seward believed that the new president, inexperienced as he was in high-ranking politics, needed help assigning duties and giving orders to the other cabinet secretaries, including Welles. He also believed that as Secretary of State, it was both his duty and his right to do so. "The secretary of state, always confident of his own judgment in any realm, viewed Welles as a ponderous bumpkin and believed that his interference was justified."⁸

Lincoln and Seward agreed on many things, but their policies on how best to deal with the rebellious South differed greatly. Before the outbreak of war, Lincoln had done his best to mollify the southern states without abandoning his principles, and had avoided doing anything that would seemingly justify their secession—or give the undecided border states reason to leave the Union. Lincoln had vowed that if war were to break out over the issue, he would not be the first to shed blood. But as historian David Donald writes, Lincoln had also vowed that he would not surrender the forts. The South was not prepared to compromise on what they believed to be their rights, however, and so they had vowed to retain the forts. "The only resolution of these contradictory positions was

⁶ Ibid., vol. 3, 131.

⁷ Ibid., vol. 4, 284.

⁸ William M. Fowler, Jr., *Under Two Flags: The American Navy in the Civil War* (Annapolis: US Naval Institute Press, 2001), 37.

for the confederates to fire the first shot;”⁹ they did just that. It appeared that there was no road left save war, and the South would have to be the aggressor.

Much of Lincoln’s staff agreed with him on the issue of the South, although some believed that Lincoln was acting too firmly to ever allow reconciliation without bloodshed. Seward believed that more delicacy was needed in order to pacify the states that were still wavering between the two sides. He was also openly opposed to the idea of war and believed that, with diplomacy and tact, it was possible to bring the Southern states back into the Union fold. While Lincoln agreed that it was a sensitive situation, the issue of slavery was not one that he was willing to sidestep. Seward made efforts to “bring the president around to his way of thinking,” and one in particular was, essentially, an attempt “to subvert Welles’ position in the Navy Department.”¹⁰

This became inescapably clear to Welles when, on the night of April 1, 1861, Lincoln’s personal secretary brought him an executive order bearing the president’s signature regarding the creation of the Bureau of Detail and the assignment of Captain Samuel Barron as its head.¹¹ The filling of this position effectively reduced Welles’ role to a mere advisor, and Welles was understandably upset. Upon questioning the president on the order, however, it was revealed that Lincoln had no memory of giving the order for the creation of a new naval bureau, let alone assigning someone to head it. He admitted to Welles that earlier in the day he had signed a stack of papers submitted to him by Seward without reading them. Welles, of course, believed Lincoln when the

⁹ David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 293.

¹⁰ Stephen R. Taaffe, *Commanding Lincoln’s Navy: Union Naval Leadership During the Civil War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 5.

¹¹ Welles, 27.

president told him that he would never seek to undermine the authority of a man he trusted and respected as he did Welles, and Lincoln revoked the order without hesitation.

Seward's belief that he had the authority to give the other cabinet heads orders without consulting with Lincoln fostered resentment in many of the other staff. Welles was no exception. The attempted relief of Fort Sumter further divided Seward and Welles.

ROWAN'S OBSERVATIONS ON EVENTS SURROUNDING FORT SUMTER

Lincoln, in his inaugural address, professed to the nation his intention of retaining the properties in the South that were owned by the Federal government—including the military forts and bases. The South objected, having already occupied several of these places and fortifying them further. Major Richard Anderson, a Union Army officer commanding the forces at Charleston, South Carolina, had been forced in December to abandon Fort Moultrie and move all of his forces to Fort Sumter, which was located on an island in the harbor.¹ When Major Anderson notified the government that he was running low on supplies and would eventually have to surrender the fort, initial responses were varied. An attempt was made in January to get reinforcements and supplies to Fort Sumter, but failed when the little chartered steamer *Star of the West* was fired upon by South Carolina forces on Morris Island.² The steamer returned to New York still bearing the supplies and soldiers. The legislature of South Carolina announced less than a week later that any further attempt by the U.S. government to reinforce or supply Fort Sumter would be regarded as an act of war.³

Many believed that an attempt to hold Fort Sumter would fail, including several high-ranking military officers such as Winfield Scott. The idea of simply surrendering the fort to the rebels, however, was abhorrent to Lincoln. As a result, when Gustavus

¹ Jack Sweetman, *American Naval History* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2002), 58.

² U.S. Navy Department, *Official Record of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894-1922) [hereafter cited as *ORN*], Gustavus Vasa Fox (Assistant Secretary of the Navy) to Gideon Welles (Secretary of the Navy), 24 February 1865, Series I, Volume 4, p. 245-251.

³ Sweetman, 58.

Fox, a former naval officer and future assistant secretary of the navy, came forward with a plan of attack that just might work, Lincoln approved of his plan and began attempting to sway others in favor of the enterprise. Fox, who had participated in the U.S. Coast Survey and knew the area, proposed landing 300 men from armed transports at night, and having them carry supplies into the fort. The landing would be covered from the harbor by Navy warships.⁴ After delaying a decision until April 4, 1861, Lincoln notified Fox that the expedition was to take place, and that he was being placed in command. They had to move quickly, because Major Anderson had notified the government that he would run out of supplies and be forced to surrender the fort on the 15th of April.⁵

Welles had believed that the mission would be approved, and he had already set himself to finding the ships and officers best suited (and most available) for the endeavor. On March 29 Lincoln sent a message to Welles, ordering “The *Pocahontas* at Norfolk, *Pawnee* at Washington, and revenue cutter *Harriet Lane* at New York, to be ready for sea with one months (sic) stores.”⁶ No mention is made of the *Powhatan*, the ship that would lay at the heart of the conflict. Welles made the necessary orders to the heads of the Navy Yards, and also telegrammed the commandant of the Brooklyn Navy Yard to “Fit out the *Powhatan* to go to sea at the earliest possible moment,”⁷ overriding his previous orders taking her out of commission. On the 30th of March, Lincoln gave permission to

⁴ Fox to Welles, 24 February 1865, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 245-251.

⁵ Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson, Volume 1* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 22.

⁶ President Abraham Lincoln to Welles, 29 March 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 227-8.

⁷ Telegram, Welles to Commandant of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 229.

Fox to begin preparations, “but to make no binding engagements.”⁸ On the 5th of April, Welles wrote to G.J. Pendergrast, Flag Officer and commander of the Home Squadron, notifying him that the *Powhatan*, Captain Samuel Mercer, the *Pawnee*, Commander Stephen C. Rowan, and the *Pocahontas*, Commander J.P. Gillis, were being temporarily withdrawn from the Home Squadron and from his command for special service by order of the president.⁹ Welles wrote to Captain Mercer, giving him orders in regard to the expedition and placing him in command of the naval forces under the supervision of the War Department and Captain Fox.¹⁰ Welles asked Lincoln to review the orders, which the president approved immediately before Welles sent them to Mercer.¹¹ Welles wrote also to Commanders Rowan and Gillis, but their instructions were much more abbreviated. They were to leave from the Navy Yard in time to reach Charleston Bar, ten miles due east of the lighthouse, on the 11th of April, and report to Captain Mercer. If he was not yet there, they were to await his arrival.¹²

On the 1st of April, unbeknownst to Welles, confidential instructions were sent to David Porter, U.S. Navy, from President Lincoln at the recommendation of Seward, ordering him to take command of the *Powhatan* “or any other United States steamer ready for sea which he may deem most fit”¹³ and prepare to go to sea. An executive order that the commandant of the New York Navy Yard received on April 1, 1861, read: “SIR: You will fit out the *Powhatan* without delay. Lieutenant Porter will relieve

⁸ Fox to Welles, 24 February 1865, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 245-251.

⁹ Welles to Flag Officer G.J. Pendergrast, 5 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 234.

¹⁰ Welles to Captain Samuel Mercer, 5 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 235.

¹¹ Welles, 23.

¹² Welles to Commander Stephen C. Rowan, 5 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 235-6; and Welles to Commander J.P. Gillis, 5 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 236.

¹³ Lincoln to Lieutenant David B. Porter, 1 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 108-9.

Captain Mercer in command of her. She is bound on secret service, and you will under no circumstances communicate to the Navy Department the fact that she is fitting out.”¹⁴

The order was signed by President Abraham Lincoln. Another order, also bearing the president’s signature, was delivered to Captain Mercer, informing him that he was being detached from the *Powhatan* so that it would be available for special service.¹⁵

The two sets of contradictory orders threw the operation into confusion, especially since one set stated that the individual giving the other set of orders was not to be alerted to the fact that contradictory orders had been issued. The commandant of the Navy Yard, Commander Andrew Foote, continued to prepare the *Powhatan*, uncertain which set of orders would take precedent and who would be in command of the vessel. Despite the orders that he was not to hear of Porter taking control of the *Powhatan*, Welles sensed that something was not quite right, despite having met with Lincoln on the 4th, and on the 5th he ordered the *Powhatan* to remain in the Navy Yard until clear orders were given.¹⁶

Lieutenant David Porter, ordered by President Lincoln to take command of the *Powhatan*, became aware of the orders made to Mercer. On the same day Welles ordered the *Powhatan* to remain in the Navy Yard, he sent a letter to Commander Foote, asking whether or not Foote believed Welles would “dare to countermand an order (written order) of the President? Meigs and myself... think it impossible.”¹⁷ He concluded that he would remain overnight telegraphing in an attempt to get to the bottom of the matter,

¹⁴ Lincoln to the Commandant of the New York Navy Yard, 1 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I vol. 4, 109.

¹⁵ Lincoln to Mercer, 1 April 1861, in *ORN*, Ibid.

¹⁶ Telegram, Welles to Commander Andrew H. Foote, 5 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 237.

¹⁷ Porter to Foote, 5 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 111.

since “[s]o much depends on having no mistakes made in this matter.” He also noted that he and Captain Meigs, in their attempt to determine what was to be done, had been telegraphing with Seward.

On the morning of the 6th, the *Powhatan* was ready to sail, and awaited only official orders declaring who was to take her, and where. Captain Mercer was standing by in case he was to take her to Charleston, but when Porter appeared with orders given to him directly from President Lincoln’s hand, it was decided that his must have precedent over any others—including Welles’ orders for the ship to remain in the yard. Porter could say nothing about the orders that had been given to him, as they were confidential, but that Lincoln himself had given them, and that they were “too explicit to be misunderstood.”¹⁸ According to Foote’s letter to Welles, “Captain Meigs, Lieutenant Porter, and Captain Mercer, after consultation, concluded that Lieutenant Porter should go out in the *Powhatan*, as the arrangements were vital to success; at least so I was informed.”¹⁹ Thus Porter left the Navy Yard with the *Powhatan*.

On the night of the 6th, in the hour before midnight, Seward and his son Frederick paid Welles a visit, bearing a telegram from Captain Meigs in New York, “stating in effect that the movements were retarded and embarrassed by conflicting orders from the Secretary of the Navy.”²⁰ At first Welles was confused, not understanding why Seward would bring the telegram to him. When Seward told him that it was about Lieutenant Porter and his command of the *Powhatan*, “I assured him that he was mistaken, that Porter had no command, and that the *Powhatan* was the flagship, as he was aware, of the

¹⁸ Porter to Foote, 6 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 112.

¹⁹ Foote to Welles, 6 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 238.

²⁰ Welles, 23.

Sumter expedition.”²¹ Seward suggested that perhaps Lincoln had discussed the matter with Commodore Silas Stringham, and that the naval adviser had never mentioned it to Welles as he ought to have done. Upon consulting with Stringham, however, it was revealed that he knew nothing of Porter’s supposed command of the *Powhatan*, either.”²² Knowing the matter must be solved at once, Welles insisted that they pay the president a visit. Despite the late hour, Lincoln was still up and attending to business when the four men arrived at the White House; he was surprised to see them. Upon learning the reason for their visit, he was even more surprised, and after listening to both men, he asked Welles if he might not be mistaken about the flagship of the Sumter expedition. Welles reminded him of the orders to Mercer, which he had read and approved, and Lincoln agreed that he had read them and consented to them, but had not remembered that the *Powhatan* was the ship involved. Welles produced a copy of Mercer’s orders, and Lincoln, “turning promptly to Mr. Seward, said that the *Powhatan* must be restored to Mercer, that on no account must the Sumter expedition fail or be interfered with.”²³ Seward objected, on the grounds that the expedition to Fort Pickens was of equal importance, and Lincoln insisted that Fort Pickens “had time and could wait, but no time was to be lost as regarded Sumter.”²⁴ Lincoln ordered Seward to telegraph the Navy Yard and have the command of the *Powhatan* returned to Mercer, and Seward again delayed, arguing that it would be difficult to get a message through to the Navy Yard at that late hour. Lincoln insisted, and Seward agreed to send the telegram. When it was

²¹ Ibid., 24.

²² Stephen R. Taaffe, *Commanding Lincoln’s Navy: Union Naval Leadership During the Civil War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 7.

²³ Welles, 24.

²⁴ Ibid.

sent, however, it bore Seward's name, not Lincoln's; Seward had already proven himself willing to procure the President's signature in dishonest ways, but now, when he had Lincoln's authorization and order, he did not issue the order in the President's name. It is possible that he deliberately placed his own name on the telegram, knowing that Porter would place more weight on the previous order given to him by the president himself. Foote stated that he sent Lieutenant F. A. Roe to attempt to overhaul the *Powhatan* and give the message to Porter.²⁵ By the time Roe managed to run the ship down, Porter noted Captain Mercer was no longer on board, and it was too late. Porter continued to Fort Pickens in the *Powhatan*.

Welles wrote of the officer in his journal:

“Although Lieutenant Porter had gone with the *Powhatan* to Pensacola, there was no order on record in the Navy Department of the facts. He was absent without leave; the last sailing-orders to the *Powhatan* were [sent to] Mercer. The whole proceeding was irregular and could admit of no justification without impeaching the integrity or ability of the Secretaries of War and Navy.”²⁶

Despite the fact that Welles knew the ship had left for Florida, and that catching up to her might not be possible, no attempt was made to inform Rowan or Gillis, and both officers left for Charleston on the 10th, having been delayed by bad weather, with no knowledge of the probability that the officer to whom they were supposed to report would not be at the rendezvous point. Mercer had stated to Foote that he had given a copy of the orders he had received from the department to Captain Faunce of the *Harriet Lane*, and ordered him to continue on the *Charleston*. Once there, Faunce was to report to the senior officer present and deliver the orders. Mercer relayed this information to

²⁵ Foote to Welles, 6 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 238-9.

²⁶ Welles, 25-6.

Welles, who possibly then assumed that knowledge of the change of plans would be apparent to everyone involved; perhaps this is the reason for the oversight.

Unfortunately, it was apparently not made clear to Faunce that, though Mercer himself would not be coming, neither would the *Powhatan*. Even more confounding, no effort was made to inform Fox himself, who was overseeing the entire endeavor, that the *Powhatan*—the flagship for the operation, and the ship which was to have been carrying 300 sailors and to have provided several of the transport vessels for the men and supplies—would no longer be at his disposal, though he also was delayed in leaving the Navy Yard until the 9th of April.

The day after his embarrassing midnight visit to the White House, Seward sent a particularly incriminating message to Judge Campbell, a Supreme Court Justice from Alabama. Campbell was opposed to the idea of war, and after his state seceded he remained in Washington, and encouraged other Southern officials to do the same, in hopes of preventing its outbreak. He was accused on more than one occasion, however, of having Northern leanings, due to his opposition to slavery, which he believed to be “an outmoded and inefficient system that was economically detrimental.”²⁷ Campbell was also outspoken in his stance toward the radical abolitionists, whom he believed had no regard for states’ rights, and was wary of the political tinderbox that was Fort Sumter. Several times Campbell wrote to Seward, who informed him each time that there were no designs to reinforce the fort and that Lincoln would soon withdraw all Federal troops from that place. Campbell, of course, relayed this information to the government of his

²⁷ David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War: A Political, Social, and Military History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 349.

home state (most likely through the Confederate Commissioners, Forsyth and Crawford, with whom he was in contact), as Seward must have known he would do. Weeks passed, however, and no move was made to remove the troops stationed there, and tension began to mount. When Campbell heard a rumor that Federal warships were preparing to move on the fort, he wrote again on the 6th of April to Seward, who responded on the 7th with a message: “Faith as to Sumter fully kept; wait and see.”²⁸

Rowan left the Norfolk Navy Yard on the 9th of April, but did not make it out to sea until the 10th due to inclement weather.²⁹ On the morning of the 11th at 7:00 AM he arrived off Charleston Bar “as near the position assigned me as the badness of the weather would enable me to judge,”³⁰ to await Captain Mercer, whom Rowan fully believed was on his way.

Captain Faunce of the *Harriet Lane* came aboard to deliver to Rowan the communication addressed to the senior naval officer present, and Rowan opened it, finding enclosed a copy of the orders that had been given to Captain Mercer, and a notification from Mercer himself that he had been detached from the command of the *Powhatan*. There was no indication, however, that the *Powhatan* herself was not coming. Captain Fox, in command of the *Baltic*, came aboard the *Pawnee* to converse with Captain Rowan, who showed Fox the copy of orders and the letter from Mercer. Rowan

²⁸ George Lunt, *The Origin of the Late War* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1867), 445. Also, Welles, 28.

²⁹ Rowan to Welles, 10 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 243.

³⁰ Rowan to Welles, 19 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 253-4.

expressed his uncertainty over whether or not the *Powhatan* was coming, but Fox insisted she was.³¹

Fox showed Rowan his instructions as to the attempted relief of Fort Sumter, but Rowan, uncertain whether his commanding officer was on his way or not, was hesitant to leave the post to which he had been ordered to remain. He readily supplied a launch and a cutter from his ship to help with Fox's efforts, but he resolved to remain and await the *Powhatan*. Fox and Faunce, commanding the *Baltic* and the *Harriet Lane*, respectively, sailed in closer to Sumter to assess the situation.³²

Fox, in his report a few days later to Welles, wrote: "As we neared the land heavy guns were heard and the smoke and shells from the batteries which had just opened fire upon Sumter were distinctly visible."³³ Fox sailed out to inform Rowan what was happening, and met him coming in. In his report, Fox wrote, "[Rowan] hailed me and asked for a pilot, declaring his intention of standing in to the harbor and sharing the fate of his brethren of the Army." Fox went on board the *Pawnee* and convinced Rowan that no such sacrifice was expected of him from the government, and that they should go ahead with the attempt to get supplies and men into Fort Sumter. In this, their orders had been clear: if the Confederates would let them land supplies for Sumter peacefully, no attempt was to be made to reinforce the fort with men. If any opposition was made, the attempt to land both supplies and soldiers was to be made. President Lincoln had sent a

³¹ Private Journal of Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy, Microfilm 180, *Papers of Stephen C. Rowan, August 27, 1826-March 28, 1890* (Washington D.C.: Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) [hereafter cited as "Rowan Papers M180"], vol. 4, 269.

³² Rowan to Welles, 19 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 253-4.

³³ Fox to Welles, 24 February 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 245-51.

message ahead to the authorities in Charleston, giving them prior warning of what was going on (as he had previously promised them he would do). Fox assumed that any attempt to land supplies under the current circumstances was surely to be met with opposition. This was a moot point at that moment, since neither the *Pawnee* nor the *Harriet Lane* was equipped with the boats necessary to land supplies or men in the heavy surf—the vessels that Fox had planned to use to land men and supplies were with the *Powhatan*, as were, Fox assumed, the supplies themselves. Fox had chartered three tugs to help with landing men, the *Freeborn*, the *Uncle Ben*, and the *Yankee*, all of which were supposed to meet them there with the naval forces. However, they had yet to arrive. Fox would find out later that the *Freeborn* had never even left New York, and the *Uncle Ben* had run afoul of the weather on the way, and had been driven into Wilmington and captured. The *Yankee* would not make it to Charleston until the action was over.³⁴

The naval officers had successfully met up with the men from the Army that were supposed to be transported into Sumter, led by First Lieutenants [E. McK.] Hudson and C. W. Thomas, and Second Lieutenant Robert O. Tyler, but without the means of landing them, Fox was at a loss as to what should be done. He was still confident that the *Powhatan* was coming, however, since he had seen her leave the New York Navy Yard on the 6th. Convinced the vessel would arrive that night, he “stood out to the appointed rendezvous and made signals all night,”³⁵ leaving Rowan in the *Pawnee* to keep watch over the happenings around Sumter.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Early the next morning, a schooner was seen attempting to make its way into Charleston Harbor, and Rowan, after firing “three or four shots across her bows”³⁶ in warning, brought her to anchor alongside the *Pawnee*. He had feared that it was a Confederate vessel and had passed so close to them to ascertain what they were doing, but she proved to be a shipping vessel laden with ice. Rowan immediately determined that the schooner would be ideal for transporting what supplies they had along with the men of the Army, and presented his idea to Fox. The latter agreed that, in light of the *Powhatan*’s absence, it was the best course of action. Lieutenant Hudson of the Army, along with several naval officers and volunteers, were to man the vessel and go in with Fox that night, to land under cover of darkness. Fox noted that the guns from Sumter had scattered any naval forces the Confederates could field, with the exception of only a few guard boats, and he maintained that “with the *Powhatan* a reenforcement [sic] would have been easy.”³⁷

Fox and Rowan had only just determined to use the schooner to land men and supplies when “dense smoke issued from the weather side of Fort Sumter.”³⁸ The guns from inside the fort were still firing away, and “most of our military and naval officers believed the smoke to proceed from an attempt to smoke out the garrison with fire rafts.”³⁹ Within two hours, flames could be seen coming from the opposite side of the fort from their location, and around noon “a body of flames curled far above the

³⁶ Rowan to Welles, 19 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 253-4.

³⁷ Fox to Welles, 24 February 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 245-51.

³⁸ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 110.

³⁹ Fox to Welles, 24 February 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 245-51.

ramparts.”⁴⁰ It was clear by that time that the fort itself was on fire, and all of them feared for Major Anderson and his men.

At around 2:00 in the afternoon, the *Pocahontas* finally arrived, and Captain Gillis went aboard the *Pawnee* to converse with Rowan and Fox. They related to him the circumstances, and their plan for getting supplies into Sumter. Rowan handed over the copy of Mercer’s orders and the letter which he had received from that officer, and placed himself under Gillis’ command as senior officer present.⁴¹ But, as they still had no launches fit to land in the rough water, their only option was to wait for nightfall, and proceed with the plan to land men with the schooner, accompanied by boats and crew from the ships if able.

Shortly after this “the flag staff on Fort Sumter was shot away and we witnessed the sad spectacle of the fall of our flag which we were so impotent to assist.”⁴² The firing soon after this ceased, and Gillis had Rowan send an officer ashore under a flag of truce “to communicate to the commanding officers of the batteries on shore, expressing our desire to take off the heroic and patriotic Major Anderson and his command if they had survived the conflagration in Fort Sumter.”⁴³ The officer (Lieutenant Marcy, according to Rowan⁴⁴) returned with the reply from General Simons, in command at Cummings Point, that Fort Sumter had surrendered, and that an answer to the request to transport Major Anderson and his men away from Sumter would be sent the following morning to

⁴⁰ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 110.

⁴¹ Ibid., vol. 4, 111.

⁴² Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 111.

⁴³ Gillis to Welles, 14 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 243-4.

⁴⁴ Rowan to Welles, 19 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 253-4.

Cummings Point.⁴⁵ The next morning Gillis was prepared to go ashore himself and receive it. Before he could embark, however, a steamer from Charleston approached the *Pocahontas* bearing a flag of truce, and asked to communicate with the commanding officer. Gillis asked him to come aboard, and he did so, bringing with him Lieutenant Snyder of the U.S. Army, bearing a message from Major Anderson, “and imparted the decision of Major Anderson to evacuate the fort, it being no longer tenable.”⁴⁶

Gillis reported the men of Anderson’s command “fought like brave men, long and well and even in their desperate condition no surrender was made, but a highly honorable evacuation.”⁴⁷ When Major Anderson finally agreed to evacuate the fort, he sent his sword to General Beauregard in surrender, but it was returned to him; the General said he “would not receive it from so brave a man.”⁴⁸ The Confederate General allowed Anderson and his men to not only retreat with all the honors of war, but also to remove with them all public and private property, and to fire a salute to the United States flag.”⁴⁹ General Beauregard recognized that though they were technically at war, owing to the Union’s attempt to provision the fort and to his forces firing on the fort, war had not officially been declared. Thus, Beauregard treated the situation as though he was not conducting a war. He did not seem to care much whether the event was called an evacuation or a surrender; he had succeeded in his goal, which was to force the Union Army out of a position of military value that he regarded as the lawful property of the

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Gillis to Welles, 16 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 251-2.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “Fort Sumter Fallen; Particulars of the Bombardment,” *New York Times*, 15 April 1861, archived online: <http://www.nytimes.com/1861/04/15/news/fort-sumpter-fallen-particulars-bombardment-fort-fire-garrison-exhaustedno.html>

⁴⁹ Gillis to Welles, 16 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 251-2.

State of South Carolina—which was no longer a part of the Union—and essential to that state’s defense.

Sumter was evacuated on the 14th of April, the day before the troops stationed there would have run out of supplies. Captain Gillis visited the fort as it was being evacuated, to encourage the men and to survey the damage that had been done, and “found the fort a complete wreck, the fire not yet all extinguished. Its shattered battlements, its tottering walls, presented the appearance of an old ruin.”⁵⁰ Gillis mentioned to Anderson the plan hatched to provision and reinforce the Fort had they not been forced to evacuate. Anderson replied it was very providential that they had never been given the opportunity to try, as any such endeavor would have had no chance of success due to the strength of the rebel forces and the number of guns that would have been ready to prevent it.

The Union forces were taken on board the Charleston steamer *Isabel* to be transported to the anchorage where their vessels waited; the Fort Sumter evacuees and their possessions were loaded onto the *Baltic*. The Union ships departed from the area that evening, leaving Fort Sumter in the possession of the Confederacy. The captains of the vessels wrote their reports for the Secretary of the Navy, as did Fox, who also wrote a letter to the Secretary of War on the 19th, after he had returned to the Navy Yard and learned that the *Powhatan* had been reassigned. He demanded an explanation as to why, after the ship had been withdrawn from his expedition, “I was permitted to sail on the 9th, the Pawnee on the 9th, and Pocahontas on the 10th, without intimation that the main

⁵⁰ Ibid.

portion, the fighting portion, of our expedition was taken away.”⁵¹ After his return to Washington, he received a letter from President Lincoln reassuring him that despite the disappointing outcome of the recent expedition, the attempt had furthered the Union cause and he should feel no guilt in the attempt. Soon after this, Fox was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy.⁵²

After the end of the war, Fox was still attempting to discover what exactly had occurred during the time of his expedition. He was disturbed by the thought that Rowan might have known that the *Powhatan* had been assigned to duty off Pensacola, and wrote to him. Rowan reminded him of the fact that he had shared with Fox all of the information he knew and had showed him the letter from Mercer and the copy of his orders. Rowan further noted that all information intimated that Mercer had been relieved of the command of the ship, and no mention had been made of the fact that the ship had been given a completely different assignment. He also reminded Fox that, at the time, the orders given to Porter were completely confidential, requiring Porter to keep his destination a secret until his arrival there and under no circumstances to reveal it to anyone. Therefore, even Captain Mercer would have been in ignorance as to the new destination of the ship. Rowan also noted that if he had known the *Powhatan* had been reassigned, “I cannot conceive it possible for me to have kept you in ignorance of the fact, to have discussed with you the probability of the vessel’s arrival, and to have passively allowed the *Baltic* to steam out to the offing and burn signals all night for a ship

⁵¹ Fox to Welles, 24 February 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 245-51.

⁵² *Ibid.*

I positively knew (Rowan's emphasis) had been assigned to other duty."⁵³ So certain had Fox been that the *Powhatan* was coming, despite Mercer's detachment from it, that Rowan had been convinced of it as well. Gillis, who had also seen the orders given to Mercer and the letter Mercer had written—all the information Rowan had been given—had also been unaware that the *Powhatan* had been given other orders, as evidenced by the report he made to Welles directly after the events surrounding the fall of Sumter, in which he remarks that "the *Powhatan* has not been here."⁵⁴ Rowan also assured Fox that he was convinced that Fox's plan had been "perfect in all its details," and no doubt "would have succeeded if the *Powhatan* had not been sent elsewhere."⁵⁵

Despite Rowan's assurances to Fox, in the end, the presence of the *Powhatan* at Charleston might have changed absolutely nothing. The forces that were there were prevented from doing much at all to help the men in Sumter owing to the horrible weather which prevented them from landing any men or supplies. Though the *Powhatan* would have had larger and heavier boats that might have been capable of battling through the rough waves to land near the fort, it is probable the evacuation would have been forced before the attempt could have been made. If Major Anderson's remarks to Captain Gillis during the evacuation are to be believed, an attempt could also have resulted in only a large number of casualties.

Most troubling was not the failure of the attempt to supply Fort Sumter, but the deliberate intervention by Seward which prevented success. Either Seward had obtained Lincoln's signature on orders for Mercer and Porter without the President reading them

⁵³ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 272.

⁵⁴ Gillis to Welles, 14 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 243-4.

⁵⁵ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 271.

(which he had already proven himself capable of and not above doing), or the President had indeed read them, agreed to them and signed them, and then between that date (April 1)⁵⁶ and the date on which he read and approved orders for Captain Mercer from Welles on the 5th,⁵⁷ had forgotten the orders he had approved previously. Either way, Seward certainly knew that the ship he was planning on having Lincoln send to Fort Pickens, the *Powhatan*, was the same ship Welles had determined to lead the naval forces in the relief of Fort Sumter.

On the night of the 6th, when the arguing parties appeared before Lincoln at almost midnight, Lincoln was surprised and confused by the events, and admitted that he may have confused the *Powhatan* with the *Pocahontas*,⁵⁸ but that ship was also to have been involved in the effort to relieve Fort Sumter. Lincoln also refused to discuss the matter of Fort Pickens with Welles, which meant that a Naval officer, in command of a Navy ship, had been given orders over the head of the Secretary of the Navy, who had not been notified. Nor does Lincoln give any explanation for allegedly putting direct orders into Lieutenant Porter's hand. Lincoln was, of course, at the time being inundated with any number of other important issues at hand, rendering it fairly easy for him to be confused over officers and ships. Lincoln had agreed to Seward's request for more support at Fort Pickens provided it did not interfere with the expedition to Fort Sumter. The President most likely assumed that Seward would have made certain that no interference occurred.

⁵⁶ Lincoln to Porter, 1 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 108-9.

⁵⁷ Welles to Mercer, 5 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 235.

⁵⁸ Taaffe, 7.

Regardless of the possible excuses he might have made, Lincoln accepted full blame for the mistake, despite Welles' suspicion otherwise: "President Lincoln never shunned any responsibility and often declared that he, and not his Cabinet, was in fault for errors imputed to them, when I sometimes thought otherwise."⁵⁹ Welles believed that Seward had been deliberately meddling with affairs outside his department, and in his diary even stated that Seward was conspiring with secessionists (Judge Campbell) in an attempt to prevent Fort Sumter from being supplied and reinforced.⁶⁰ Even in this accusation, however, Welles was charitable towards Seward, stating that he did not agree with Seward and his opinions of how to deal with the South, but believed Seward probably had reconciliation in mind. Seward may have believed reunification possible if Fort Sumter was given up to the South in a bloodless manner. Welles expressed this in his musings on Seward's beliefs in his diary when he wrote, "If not supplied or reinforced, famine would certainly effect the downfall of the fortress without bloodshed on either side. Until blood was spilled, there was hope of conciliation."⁶¹

Following the incident at Fort Sumter, Rowan returned to Washington, where he waited in the *Pawnee* for orders. The very same day he reported his arrival at Washington, he was dispatched again for Norfolk.

⁵⁹ Welles, 25.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 12.

⁶¹ Ibid.

ROWAN AT THE NORFOLK NAVY YARD

The Norfolk Navy Yard, also known as the Gosport Navy Yard, was located along the banks of the Elizabeth River, and during the time leading up to the Civil War it was the largest Navy Yard in the country.¹ Although its location had long been a very convenient one, being roughly in the middle of the Atlantic coast, at the beginning of 1861 its position was a precarious one. As the southern states seceded one by one, the federal government watched on in concern. Several states teetered on the edge of secession, and the government was hesitant to make any move that might push them over the line. Virginia was one such state, and although the Norfolk Navy Yard contained vast amounts of supplies and several ships, the North did not want to provoke the people of the state by moving the naval stores to a more stable location or by making an attempt to reinforce the yard.

This navy yard, at the time of its fall to the Confederacy, held eleven ships, of which most were present for repairs of some sort. “Undoubtedly the most important was the modern, powerful 3,200-ton steam frigate *Merrimack*. It had been sent to the yard to have its weak, unreliable engines rebuilt.”² Welles, concerned about this ship in particular, ordered the yard’s commandant, Commodore Charles F. McCauley to ready the ship for service as quickly as possible. He arranged to have two hundred seamen, complete with a fireman crew and coal heavers, to head to the Norfolk yard to man the *Merrimac*, and for Commander James Alden to captain it; Alden’s confidential orders

¹ Spencer C. Tucker, *Blue and Gray Navies: The Civil War Afloat* (Annapolis: US Naval Institute Press, 2006), 29.

² *Ibid.*, 66.

were to bring her out of the harbor and take her to Philadelphia.³ To help prepare her for sea service, he also ordered Chief Engineer Benjamin F. Isherwood to get the ship's engines in working order and to ready her for immediate departure. On the 16th of April, 1861, Welles wrote to McCauley and ordered, "The vessels and stores under your charge you will defend at any hazard, repelling by force, if necessary, any and all attempts to seize them, whether by mob violence, organized effort, or any assumed authority."⁴ Welles emphasized the importance of the ship being ready to sail at a moment's notice, and that any armament or stores that could be loaded onto the ships should be moved out of reach of the rebels. He cautioned McCauley to keep watch carefully for any sign of violence or opposition. The tone of the letter lacked the urgency that it might have conveyed had not Welles received a letter earlier that day from McCauley which stated that the *Merrimack* was essentially ready to sail; all that remained to prepare her was to finish loading equipment.⁵

Welles knew that the number of men at the yard would be insufficient to crew all of the ships that were fit for sea or that could be made so in short order, and so he ordered Commodore G. J. Pendergrast, commanding the sloop *Cumberland*, to sail to Norfolk and lend assistance in preparing those ships that could be removed from the yard and in manning them.⁶

³ U.S. Navy Department, *Official Record of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894-1922) [hereafter cited as *ORN*], Welles to Commander James Alden, 11 April 1861, in *ORN*, Series I, Volume 4, 275.

⁴ Welles to Commodore Charles F. McCauley, 16 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 277-78.

⁵ McCauley to Welles, 16 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 277.

⁶ Welles to Pendergrast, 16 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 278.

On the 18th of April, Chief Engineer Isherwood wrote to Welles, reporting that his initial inspection of the *Merrimack* revealed that the ship's engines "were in a wretched state," due to the fact that much of her machinery had been removed with the intention of replacing it with more powerful equipment. On his orders, men worked continuously from early Monday morning through Wednesday afternoon in the effort to make her seaworthy. Though he reported to McCauley that the ship was ready, the commander said that her departure could wait until morning. In an effort to be ready as soon as the order was given, Isherwood ordered that a watch be kept in the engine room all night, and at daybreak the next morning, the fires were lit and the *Merrimack* was readied for sea. McCauley again postponed the ship's departure, and resisted Isherwood's call to release the vessel. McCauley stated that he had decided to keep her at the yard and ordered that the fires be drawn.⁷ McCauley had been informed that the obstructions in the passage that had been placed by the Confederates would prevent the ship's escape. He had also been led to believe that any attempt to remove the vessel from the yard would excite the rebel forces. Despite Isherwood's protests and his assurances that the ships were capable of making it over the obstructions, McCauley would not relent. Isherwood had McCauley endorse his orders, absolving him of guilt of the situation, and he returned to Washington to report the situation to Welles.

Welles was furious. He ordered Commodore Hiram Paulding to proceed to the Norfolk Navy Yard to relieve McCauley of his command. His additional orders were clear:

⁷ Benjamin F. Isherwood to Welles, 18 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 280-1.

“You will do all in your power to protect and place beyond danger the vessels and property belonging to the United States. On no account should the arms and munitions be permitted to fall into the hands of insurrectionists, or those who would wrest them from the custody of the Government...”⁸

Welles insisted that government property be destroyed if necessary to keep it out of rebel hands, but he made it inescapably clear that such a course was to be pursued only in the event that no other action was possible.

Welles also wrote to Colonel Harris of the Marine Corps to ready one hundred Marines for service and to place them on the *Pawnee* upon her arrival,⁹ and ordered Commander Rowan to take the *Pawnee*, with Captain Wright of the U.S. Army, the detail of Marines, and Commodore Paulding all on board, and sail for Norfolk.¹⁰

Rowan wrote that on the way Paulding informed him that he intended “to bring out all the ships at Norfolk.”¹¹ Upon their arrival at Norfolk, however, it was discovered that they were too late. Rowan reported, “The Yard was a melancholy sight. Commodore McCauley despairing of aid and fearing that the insurgents might capture the Yard had scuttled all the ships that afternoon and when we arrived there we saw nothing but ruin.”¹²

Though McCauley had received multiple letters from Welles indicating the importance of removing the *Merrimack* from the yard to keep it out of enemy hands, he had refused to let her sail, and in the end it was still in the yard when he ordered all the

⁸ Welles to Commodore Hiram Paulding, 18 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 282.

⁹ Welles to Colonel John Harris, 19 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 285.

¹⁰ Welles to Rowan, 19 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 285.

¹¹ Private Journal of Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy, Microfilm 180, *Papers of Stephen C. Rowan, August 27, 1826-March 28, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) [hereafter cited as “Rowan Papers M180”], vol. 3, 135.

¹² *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 286.

ships to be scuttled and burned. McCauley had certainly understood the ship's importance, and the government's desire to move her to a safer place. However, he was surrounded by men whose loyalty lay with the Confederacy—men whose advice he had trusted. These men had managed to convince him of circumstances that were not true, including the effectiveness of the obstructions laid out at the narrowest points of the route to open sea, and also the number of men who might come down on the yard if any attempt to remove the ship was made.

While the situation was indeed volatile, the Confederacy would not have been able at that time to bring any force capable of preventing the *Merrimack*'s escape to bear. But McCauley had been duped into believing the rumors; hence, he had prevented the *Merrimack*'s departure, and the departure of any other ship that might have been saved, despite several of the ships being fully prepared and capable of making it to sea. Paulding, arriving in the *Pawnee*, reported that these same officers who had mislead McCauley, "being Southern men, had tendered their resignations and abandoned their duty."¹³ McCauley, having been deserted by those under him who were loyal to the South, and under the impression that the yard was in danger of being attacked by the rebels, had ordered his few remaining men to burn and sink all of the ships in the yard. By the time he arrived, Paulding had little choice but to finish what had already begun, and ordered the destruction of everything left in the yard that could not be easily carried off. "Early on the morning of 21 April the screw sloop *Pawnee* towed off the sailing sloop *Cumberland*. Once they were safe, Paulding gave the signal to torch the yard."¹⁴

¹³ Paulding to Welles, 28 April 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 289-91.

¹⁴ Tucker, 66.

Rowan recorded the incident in his journal, noting that the “destruction of the yard was as painful to me as it was impolitic on the part of the government.” Rowan, wanting “to remain with the ships and defend the yard,” believed “we could have held it. I saw no good reason for burning the ships since it was in our power to prevent their exit by Fort Monroe.” Rowan insisted that he had “beseeched the Commd. not to burn, and said a great deal more than justifiable (sic).” In particular, Rowan “did beg hard to spare the *Pennsylvania* but to no purpose.” Rowan “returned to Washington with a sad heart.”¹⁵

Unfortunately, the destruction of the Navy Yard and its contents was not as complete as the retreating officers thought. Several barrels powder that had been left on the dry dock failed to ignite. The Confederates wasted no time once the Union vessels left, rushing into the yard in time to save many supplies from burning. A telegraph to Secretary Mallory from Confederate Navy Lieutenant G. T. Sinclair the following day read, in part:

“The *Pennsylvania*, *Merrimack*, *Germantown*, *Raritan*, *Columbia*, and *Dolphin* are burned to the water’s edge and sunk. All can be raised; the *Plymouth* easily, not much injured. The *Germantown* crushed and sunk by the falling of shears. Her battery, new and complete, uninjured by fire; can be recovered. The most abominable vandalism at the yard. Destruction less than might be expected... About 4,000 shells thrown overboard; can be recovered. The *Germantown*’s battery will be up and ready for service to-morrow. In ordnance building all small arms broken and thrown overboard will be fished up. The brass howitzers thrown overboard are up. The *Merrimack* has 2,200 10-pound cartridges in her magazine in water-tight tanks... Only eight guns, 32-pounders, destroyed. About 1,000 or more from 11-inch to 32-pounders taken, and ready for our cause. Many of them are ready in batteries. We saved about 130 gun carriages; all saved at St. Helena [Va.]. Many thousands of shells and shot, from 11-inch to 32-pounders, safe. All the machinery uninjured. Magazine captured, with 2,000 barrels of powder and

¹⁵ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 3, 136-7.

vast numbers of shells and quantities of fixed ammunition. An attempt made to blow up the dry dock failed.”¹⁶

Despite Paulding's assertions that there was no other course that could have been taken, he received much criticism for his decision to so quickly abandon the yard when his express orders stated that such a course of action should have been a very last resort. Many officers believed that much more could have been done; even McCauley, who had been lied to repeatedly about the power and numbers of the Confederate forces who lay in wait just outside the yard, believed that the position could have been held until reinforcements arrived. Rowan was certain that they could have held it. Perhaps Paulding believed that with the destruction of the yard and the ships already begun, it was not worth the risk of losing so many men to attempt to hold the yard.

Regardless of what was believed after the fact, Paulding at the time seemed honestly to have believed his actions were justified. Of course, had Paulding realized how many guns and what supplies the Confederates would manage to recover from the ruins of the yard, or if he could have foreseen in what manner the *Merrimack* would be resurrected, he almost certainly would have made an attempt to hold the yard. The cannons, also, were of integral importance to the Confederates, and throughout the war they would be found on battlefields across the nation. Rear Admiral Daniel Ammen, musing on the loss of the yard, questioned “the ability of the Confederacy to establish

¹⁶ Telegram, Lieutenant G. T. Sinclair to Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen H. Mallory, 22 April 1861, *ORN*, I, 4, 306.

defenses against a respectable naval force”¹⁷ had they not acquired these cannons. The South had the natural resources, but not the means, to produce effective arms.

Rowan remembered the destruction of the yard and the retreat vividly, and years later, he wrote of it again in his journal. Though it would be difficult to substantiate the claim, he was still of the very strong opinion that they could have held the yard. Rowan poignantly wrote of the pain and humiliation he felt: “Was there not reason for humiliation when I was compelled to retire with a 50 gun frigate fully manned and equipped with 800 good troops in the *Pawnee*, besides her own crew and officers? Notwithstanding this force we were running away as fast as steam could take us.” Rowan truly believed “we could have held the Navy Yard in spite of all opposition. The *Pennsylvania* could have been manned and as she lay in a bed of mud would have been a perfect floating battery. The *Cumberland* could have held the upper part of the Navy Yard and the *Pawnee* and the tug *Yankee* could have patrolled the river above and below the ships and Yard and prevented the enemy from using fireships.”¹⁸

Instead of destroying the yard, wrote Rowan, the Navy should have stood firm and “we might have been reinforced in three or four days to any necessary extent. As it was, we met the *Keystone State* coming in with a number of Seamen coming to join us. Oh! What a blunder we made in pursuing this course. Had we held the Yard we should have saved all the cannon, nearly 2000, all the immense store of provisions, clothing, naval stores, copper, iron, steel, ship timber and drydock and last, but not least, those

¹⁷ Daniel Ammen, *The Navy in the Civil War: Volume II. The Coast* (New York: Charles Schribner's Sons, 1885), 57.

¹⁸ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 287.

magnificent workshops with the most perfect machinery and tools this country could produce.”¹⁹

¹⁹ Ibid.

ROWAN AT ALEXANDRIA

On May 24, 1861, Rowan led the Navy half of an Army/Navy expedition to occupy the town of Alexandria, Virginia. His primary role was to provide transportation for the Army and to provide cover for them, if needed, with the *Pawnee's* guns.

However, Rowan states that, "As soon as the steamers came in full view of the city, and so near as not to expose the secrecy of the expedition, I sent Lieutenant R.B. Lowry on shore to demand the surrender of the town."¹ Rowan waited to demand the surrender of the town until it was obvious that the Union was going to make a move on it, but it was still not his place to do so.

Rowan's action resulted in no misfortune for the Union cause, but Welles rebuked him for it, and rightly so. Rowan's orders had been to provide transportation for the Army, and to supply what men he could for operations on shore, should the need for them arise. He was not told in any great detail what the orders of the Army were, and sending an officer ashore might have ruined carefully laid plans. Welles, expressing his displeasure, was careful to point this fact out in the letter he wrote to Rowan. Rowan's actions, and his compassion, while reflecting well on him as a man, did not reflect well on him as an officer of the Navy.

Rowan was later praised for this action, which undoubtedly prevented bloodshed. Indeed, most sources make no mention of the fact that Rowan sent an officer ashore to demand the town's surrender; those who do mention it treat the incident as if it was a

¹ U.S. Navy Department, *Official Record of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894-1922) [hereafter cited as *ORN*], Rowan to Welles, 29 May, 1861, Series I, Volume 4, 478-9.

perfectly standard—or even laudable—course of action. Nonetheless, to Welles, Rowan had still stepped past the bounds of his authority and acted in an irresponsible manner; had the Army been carrying out more complex plans than Rowan assumed, it could have been disastrous for everyone involved.

The troops occupied the town, for the most part, peacefully, with two notable fatalities, Colonel Elmer E. Ellsworth, whose New York 11th Infantry Regiment was known as the “Zouaves,” and the proprietor of the Marshall House Inn, James W. Jackson. The Inn proudly displayed on its roof a large Confederate flag that was visible from the White House, and which Ellsworth removed. Jackson confronted Ellsworth, whom he shot and killed. One of Ellsworth’s privates immediately retaliated, killing Jackson. Ellsworth was mourned across the Union as their first notable casualty, but Jackson would be lauded as the Confederacy’s first martyr.

Rowan, meanwhile, sent Lieutenant Chaplin in one of the *Pawnee*’s cutters “to lie off the starting point of the railroad cars, and to jump on shore immediately as the steamers touched the wharf and cut off the departure of the early morning train then at that point.”² Though the engine of the train escaped, the cars, which were loaded with railroad iron, were captured. Rowan sent one of the other cutters to reclaim the *Collyer* and the *Gipsy*, two steamers which had been seized by the Confederates.³ Alexandria would remain in the possession of the Union until the end of the war.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

ROWAN AND THE UNION BLOCKADE: THE BATTLE OF AQUIA CREEK

On April 19, 1861, President Lincoln had ordered a blockade of the southern coastal states that had seceded from the Union up to that point—South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, and Texas. Eight days later, he added North Carolina and Virginia. Lincoln's declaration was met with a sneer from the powers of Europe, who thought the United States' naval power to be woefully inadequate to even attempt such an endeavor. The South had over 3,000 miles of coastline, and at the time the blockade was declared, the Union had only a handful of ocean-worthy vessels available to enact it. Welles rectified this problem as quickly as he could, and utilized the vessels available for the objectives that were most important. One of these objectives was, of course, protecting the waterways near the capitol.

Following the occupation of Alexandria, Rowan served in the *Pawnee* in the Potomac Flotilla on patrol duty in the waters around Washington. The flotilla ranged the Rappahannock and Potomac Rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay, which was made increasingly dangerous by Confederate shore batteries. On May 29, three Union vessels, the *Thomas Freeborn*, *Anacostia*, and *Resolute*, began a bombardment of an enemy battery at Aquia Creek, which had been erected to protect the Fredricksburg and Potomac Railroad. On the 31st, Rowan received orders to proceed from his location at Alexandria to Aquia Creek to help.

Rowan responded quickly, steaming through the night to join Captain Ward, the ranking officer present, and his little force. He notes that he passed the creek around 3:00 AM, and a few hours later met up with Ward, who had anchored the force ten miles

below the battery for the night.¹ Rowan participated in the attack the next morning, utilizing shells and his 9-inch guns. “The battery was twice silenced under the weight of our fire, but resumed again when our fire ceased.”² The *Pawnee* was struck nine times during the bombardment, though the only injury reported was to Rowan himself, who received a minor scrape on his face caused by a splinter of wood thrown up by enemy shot. The ship itself suffered four shots to the hull, one of which tore through the bulwarks and the deck; the main topsail yard, mizzenmast head, and topmast, plus the smokestack, were all damaged. The Confederates had focused their fire primarily on the *Pawnee*, the largest ship present and therefore the easiest target.

Despite the amount of fire (Rowan alone reported firing 38 rounds from his rifled cannon and 155 hollow shot, plus all of the 10- and 15-second shell he had available), and Ward’s report that “squads were observed from time to time taking to their heels along the beach with a speed and bottom truly commendable for its prudence and highly amusing to the seamen,”³ the battle was inconclusive. Rowan remained to hold Ward’s place on the blockade while Ward took his ship, the *Freeborn*, to Washington for repairs, after which Rowan did the same.⁴

The rumor of the Confederates running away from the battle was apparently one that had been circulated, because Captain Lynch of the Confederate Navy felt the need to write to the editor of the *Fredricksburg News*, stating that if Ward had “for once violated

¹ U.S. Navy Department, *Official Record of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894-1922) [hereafter cited as *ORN*], Rowan to Welles, 2 June 1861, in *ORN*, Series I, Volume 4, 492-3.

² *Ibid.*

³ Captain Ward to Welles, 1 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 491-2.

⁴ Telegram, Welles to Rowan, 3 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 502.

his instincts and been sincere he would have stated that men were seen running toward, as well as from, the batteries, mostly bearing ammunition.”⁵ A report from William B. Bate of the Confederate Army to the Confederate Secretary of War reported on the 11th that "Everything is peaceable here now except the *Pawnee*, which still coils about our shore like a wounded viper. We have vedettes near her.”⁶

Rowan’s presence certainly made the Confederates nervous; Captain W. Palmer, a topographical engineer assisting in the Coast Survey and performing a reconnaissance on the Potomac River of Lower Cedar, Mathias, and White House Points, wrote to Professor A.D. Bade, the Superintendent of the Coast Survey, stating that Rowan was kind enough to lend him one of the *Pawnee*’s armed boats, which trailed him while he conducted his survey near the batteries. "The proximity of her guns may have had a good influence on the rebels there, as, although I landed and scoured the woods at these places with an escort of two officers and twenty men only, I was not disturbed by them.”⁷

Rowan continued to blockade the area, relaying any pertinent information either to the commanding officer in the area or directly to Welles. On June 10th, he reported to Welles the capture of a rowboat that had appeared to be delivering mail. He also noted that the rebels were constructing new batteries on the heights above Aquia Creek.⁸

Continuing his observation efforts, Rowan discovered a little over a week later a large quantity of supplies, mostly bacon and whiskey, belonging to a Mr. Carpenter and

⁵ Captain Lynch to the editor of the Fredricksburg News, 9 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 499-500.

⁶ William B. Bate to Confederate Secretary of War, 11 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 500.

⁷ Captain W. Palmer to Professor A.D. Bade, 8 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 505-6.

⁸ Rowan to Welles, 10 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 506-7.

being stored in a fish house near Maryland Point. He wrote to Welles: "I respectfully request instructions in the premises. I believe they are intended for shipment to Virginia, but have no proof. I send a description of the articles with the marks, etc."⁹ He included a list of all of the goods and the labels on them, which appear to be the names of intended recipients. Welles responded that "unless those who have the care and custody of these stores can satisfy you that [Virginia] is not their destination, but that they belong in good faith to the citizens of Maryland, and are to be retained and consumed in that State, you will be justified in seizing them."¹⁰ This communication was delivered the same day, June, 18; and Rowan seized the goods and sent them to Washington, along with a more detailed explanation of their origin and the reasons for their seizure, also that same day. Rowan stated that he had good reason to believe that Carpenter was communicating with the enemy, and that the goods were almost certainly intended as supplies for the Confederates. Rowan explained that most of his information was "derived from colored people, who answer questions without reserve when opportunity offers."¹¹ A little over a week later, however, on June 29th, Welles ordered the goods returned: "From statements that have been made to the Department by reliable parties with regard to the character of Mr. Carpenter it is disposed to direct the return of the seized articles."¹²

On June 21, off Aquia Creek, Rowan picked up a Confederate deserter, John Dowling, who swam to the *Pawnee* while being fired upon from the shore.¹³ Based on

⁹ Rowan to Welles, 17 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 520-1.

¹⁰ Welles to Ward, including orders for Rowan, 18 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 521.

¹¹ Rowan to Welles, 18 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 521-2.

¹² Welles to Commander John A. Dahlgren, 29 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 523.

¹³ Rowan to Welles, including statement of John Dowling, 21 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 530-1.

Rowan's correspondence to Welles, Dowling reported what he saw behind the Confederate lines, including information about earthworks at West Point, the terminus of the Richmond Railroad, and the four guns that were expected to arrive there any day.

Dowling further reported he saw

“but one company of troops in Fredricksburg. There were no defenses in and around Richmond when I left on the 16th instant. I heard that a battery was being erected 10 miles below Williamsburg, between the two rivers. I heard they were preparing or had a battery near Jamestown. There were some 3,000 troops between James River and Yorktown, mostly cavalry. There were about 3,000 troops at Richmond, mostly from cotton states.”¹⁴

Dowling noted that in Richmond “the principal crossing place for troops, etc., from Maryland was at a point about 35 miles below Alexandria.” Moreover, there were a number of regiments at Aquia Creek,

“about 3,000 men, encamped behind the hills. Forty-two men are stationed at the depot. The steamboat Page is up the creek and not manned or armed. The new battery on the north hill has three 8-inch guns; the south battery, two rifled cannons; the lower battery, one rifled cannon.”¹⁵

Rowan noted that Dowling's report was taken and recorded in his presence.¹⁶

Rowan reported, on June 25, a reconnaissance of Mathias Point, on which he was accompanied by the steamboat *James Guy*, which had on board Captain Woodbury of the Engineer Corps, and Captain Palmer (the same Captain Palmer that Rowan had previously lent a boat to) of the Topographical Engineer Corps, U.S. Army. They were attempting to determine whether or not the enemy was erecting batteries there. Rowan stated that he sent ashore in two boats a party of forty sailors and marines in charge of Lieutenant Chaplin and Master Blue, all under the command of Captain Woodbury.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Rowan wrote that at least one company of the enemy was present, but that they were kept at bay by the guns of the *Pawnee*: "During the reconnaissance [sic] I threw some thirty shell, which kept the enemy in check, notwithstanding their reported force is 600 men, of whom 100 or more are mounted."¹⁷ A boat was captured, along with a slave, who told them that "200 troops are kept on the beach constantly, and the remainder in camps."¹⁸

Two days later, Rowan reported an engagement at Mathias Point and the death of Commander Ward. He had received an order the evening before from Ward to send him two boats, armed and equipped, under the command of Lieutenant Chaplin, which Rowan immediately complied with, and the boats were on their way with the *Resolute* by 9 PM. Rowan guessed from the materials requested that Ward was preparing to land a party at Mathias Point, with the intention of removing the trees and undergrowth, which were screening the rebels and their work from view of the Union Navy. "At 9 oclock this evening the *Freeborn* and *Reliance* came up, having been repulsed by the rebels at Mathias Point, in which Lieutenant Chaplin and his command escaped utter destruction by a miracle."¹⁹ Rowan reports that Commander Ward had been killed, "shot in the abdomen while in the act of sighting his bow gun."²⁰

Not all of his report was negative, however. Rowan praised the "gallantry, coolness, and presence of mind of Lieutenant Chaplin, of the *Pawnee*, commanding the party on shore. He remained steady and cool amongst a perfect hail of musketry from hundreds of men, while he collected his own people and

¹⁷ Rowan to Welles, 25 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 535.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Rowan to Welles, 27 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 537.

²⁰ Ibid.

made good his retreat without leaving the enemy a trophy beyond a few sand bags and some axes and, so far as I can ascertain, the muskets of the wounded men."²¹

Lieutenant Chaplin left the shore with the last man, who was injured and unable to swim. Chaplin "took him on his shoulders, musket and all, and safely reached the boat without a scratch, save a musket hole through the top of his cap."²² Rowan also included the orders sent to him by Ward and a list of the casualties, which included Ward as the only man killed, two men "wounded dangerously," and two "wounded severely."²³ The next day Rowan forwarded a detailed report made by Lieutenant Chaplin.²⁴

Though the Union troops had lost the battle, the enemy was shaken by the engagement. In a letter regarding the same event, Colonel Daniel Ruggers of the Confederate Army stated that though they essentially won the engagement and were able to push the Union troops back off of the point, he stated the opinion, "in which all the field officers concur, that without artillery this command can not hold this important position and prevent the enemy from effecting a substantial lodgment and strike an irretrievable blow against the interest and material defenses of the State."²⁵ The Confederate Colonel warned that the Union forces might return very soon, and in numbers large enough to retake the point unless reinforcements and artillery were received.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ F.M. Gunnell to Rowan, 27 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 538.

²⁴ Rowan to Wells, including report of Lieutenant Chaplin, 27 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 539-40.

²⁵ Brigadier-General T.H. Holmes to General Robert E. Lee, transmitting report of Colonel Ruggles, 28 June 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 542-4.

On July 9, 1861, Rowan reported the discovery of two Confederate explosive devices, found two days previously by Acting Master William Budd of the *Resolute*. One sprung a leak and quickly sank; the second one, after being disabled, was sent to Dahlgren on the *Freeborn*. Budd wrote a report of their examination of it:

“The apparatus in its perfect state consisted of two large oil casks connected by 25 fathoms of 3k-inch manila line, the line being kept on top of the water by corks secured to it at intervals of 2 feet. Underneath each cask, at a distance of 6 feet, was slung an iron cylinder, 4 feet 6 inches in length and 18 inches in diameter at one end and 17 inches at the other. The fuze for igniting the combustible material contained in the cylinder was placed in the cask in the following manner: The upper end of the fuze was secured on the top and near the outer end of the cask, being protected from moisture by a square box and gutta-percha pipe following it through the aperture it was placed in. It was carefully coiled on a platform secured on the inside of the cask for the purpose of protecting it from any water that might lodge in the bottom. From the platform it entered a copper pipe that connected with a gutta-percha hose, the lower end of which was secured to the iron cylinder below. In each cask were two fuzes, each about 40 feet in length. All four had been on fire.”²⁶

Budd provided a sketch with the distances marked according to measurements he made when the devices were secured. Rowan guessed that the device was to have been fired from a distance and was meant to explode once close enough to its intended target. “The idea was a wicked one,” Rowan wrote, “but the execution clumsy.”²⁷

²⁶ Rowan to Welles, transmitting report of William Budd, 9 July 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 4, 566-7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

ROWAN AND THE UNION BLOCKADE: CAPTURE OF HATTERAS INLET

As more vessels were built or otherwise acquired and the Navy was strengthened, the Union was able to be more offensive in its strategy, and one of their main goals was enforcement of the blockade. To do this, ports along the coast had to be secured. As the war progressed the blockade grew stronger, but it was met with much opposition. The South and the nations of Europe tested and tried the blockade throughout the course of the war, and nowhere were they so unrelenting as the coast of North Carolina. Much of this state's coastal region is dominated by the North Carolina Sounds, which are separated from the Atlantic Ocean by the Outer Banks, a string of barrier islands two hundred miles long. The shifting sand and bad weather of the area made navigation notoriously difficult and dangerous; just outside the Outer Banks lay one of the most treacherous stretches of water on the U.S. coast. Here the icy Labrador Current, which flows from the Baffin Sea between Greenland and Canada, and the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, from the Caribbean Sea, clash. The hazardous sailing conditions of the area have claimed thousands of ships, earning the area the epithet "the Graveyard of the Atlantic."

The extreme geography and perilous sailing conditions made the area difficult to blockade, and the Confederates took full advantage. Indeed, much of North America's coastal shipping passed within sight of the lighthouse situated on Cape Hatteras. Much of the shipping out of the West Indies did, as well. The notion was that nature "seemed

almost to have designed the North Carolina coast with an offensive defense in mind.”¹ The South, recognizing the area’s importance, made efforts to defend it. The Confederates constructed forts at the inlets of the sounds. The most successful of these was Fort Fisher, near the mouth of the Cape Fear River. The port of Wilmington, which Fort Fisher protected, was the most popular and the most successful port for blockade-running in the South. Owing to the cover provided by the Fort, Wilmington would remain an open and integral supply-line for the Confederacy until almost the end of the war.

North Carolina also scraped together a small navy consisting of five ships, the *Winslow*, a side-wheel steamer, and four propeller-driven river boats, the *Oregon*, the *Ellis*, the *Raleigh*, and the *Beaufort*. The tiny fleet, collectively nicknamed the “Mosquito Fleet,” was immediately turned over to the Confederacy, who used the smaller river boats to patrol the sounds and rivers. These smaller vessels were armed with only one cannon apiece, and General D.H. Hill, the Confederacy’s commander in that district, did not think much of any of them:

“In the absence of a regular supply of coal they frequently had to tie up on shore and cut green wood to keep steam in their boilers. Their crews were not gunners, but fishermen, soldiers, or farmers, hurriedly taught to fire a gun. Their fuses were uncertain and their guns liable to burst after a few rounds... If the stakes had not been life and the issues desperation, blood, [and] death, the laugh of the satirist would have driven the “mosquito fleet”... from the waters.”²

These vessels, small, light, and with shallow draft, were ideal for patrolling such an area. The *Winslow* was a little better off; this ship was faster and more maneuverable,

¹ William R. Trotter, *Ironclads and Columbiads: The Coast (The Civil War in North Carolina)* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 1991), 22.

² *Ibid.*, 19-20.

and, being a former coastal trading ship, was designed to handle the shallow waters of the inland regions and also the coastal waters outside the barrier islands. It was armed with two guns, one a 32-pounder and the other a smaller rifled cannon. The Captain of the *Winslow*, Lieutenant Commander Thomas M. Crossan, employed his ship in privateering during the early part of the war, and “for six weeks in the summer of 1861, that vessel... reportedly captured sixteen ships traversing the Outer Banks.”³

Early in the war, the shortage of seaworthy vessels prevented the Union Navy from stationing an adequate force off the coast of North Carolina. May of 1861 saw only two vessels on blockade for the entirety of the state, and these, owing to the weather, were forced to stay far out to sea or risk being dashed on the shore.⁴ During the following summer of 1862, over one hundred blockade runners passed through Hatteras Inlet alone. It quickly became clear to the Union that the area was a hotbed for Confederate privateering and blockade-running; to compel the South and, more importantly, European nations, to take the blockade seriously, Union forces must secure the area.

The Blockade Strategy Board, headed by Captain (later Rear Admiral) Samuel Francis Du Pont, was organized to strategize the most effective method to utilize the resources available to enforce the blockade on the seceding states. Originally, the coast of the Tar Heel State received low priority. The plan was to sink stone-filled old vessels in the channels of the inlets leading into the sounds and leave the rest to the offshore blockade. Once ‘the Confederate privateers began their sorties into the trade routes and

³ John S. Carbone, *The Civil War In Coastal North Carolina* (Raleigh: Office of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2001), 5-6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

the marine insurance rates in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia began soaring,”⁵

this attitude changed quickly. The privateering had clearly taken its toll on the private investors and the shipping companies based in the north.

In August after an entire summer of raids by the Hatteras privateers, Lieutenant Selfridge of the U.S. Navy wrote a letter to Welles explaining the situation there. “It seems that the coast of Carolina is infested with a nest of privateers that have thus far escaped capture, and, in the ingenious method of their cruising, are probably likely to avoid the clutches of our cruisers.” He went on to explain this method:

“Hatteras Inlet, a little south of Cape Hatteras Light, seems their principle rendezvous. Here they have a fortification that protects them from assault. A look-out in the lighthouse proclaims the coast clear, and a merchantman in sight; they dash out and are back again in a day with their prize. So long as these remain it will be impossible to entirely prevent their depredations, for they do not venture out when men-of-war are in sight; and, in the bad weather of the coming season, cruisers cannot always keep their stations off these inlets without great risk of going ashore.”⁶

Selfridge also suggested a way in which the Union might be rid of them, but another plan had been long in the making. The Lincoln administration was itching for a victory. The Union Army had been encountering much more difficulty with the Confederate forces than expected, and only a month before they had fought the first major land battle of the war—and suffered their first defeat. The First Battle of Bull Run (or First Manassas, as the Confederates called it) left the Union Army in Virginia in no condition to do much

⁵ Trotter, 25-6

⁶ U.S. Navy Department, *Official Record of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894-1922) [hereafter cited as *ORN*], Lieutenant Selfridge to Welles, 10 August 1861, Series I, Volume 6, 72-3.

but recover. Lincoln and his administration were facing the angry outcry of the American people.

ROWAN'S ROLE IN CAPTURING HATTERAS INLET

Seeking a badly-needed victory, the Lincoln administration turned to the Navy. The Union Navy was still struggling to increase the number of adequate ships at its disposal, and to fill them with able men, but it still held the edge over Confederate Naval forces. Hatteras Inlet was a prime target; while the location was disturbingly well-suited for defense, it was known, thanks to letters and reports on the area made by two officers who had spent time as prisoners in the area, that it was poorly fortified and grossly undermanned.¹ The Confederates had determined that there was a greater need on the battlefields in Virginia for troops and arms than virtually anywhere else, and they were hard-pressed to provide what was needed there, let alone everywhere else. For the rebels, weapons and ammunition “were too few or too late, their powder and shot too limited, experienced gunners too rare, and good engineers too overworked or under-equipped to create any kind of coherent defensive front.” This was the case for the Confederacy on virtually every battlefield, but, according to historian William Trotter, “nowhere was this waffling policy of too-little-too-late more dramatic in its failures and more tantalizing in its might-have-beens than on the North Carolina coast in 1861.”²

The joint Army-Navy operation that took Hatteras Inlet was commanded by General Benjamin F. Butler of the Army and Flag Officer Silas Horton Stringham of the Navy. The goal was to put an end to Confederate raiding in the area and to cut off the

¹ U.S. Navy Department, *Official Record of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894-1922) [hereafter cited as *ORN*], Fox to Silas H. Stringham, transmitting report of Daniel A. Campbell, 13 August 1861, Series I, Volume 6, 77-80.

² William R. Trotter, *Ironclads and Columbiads: The Coast (The Civil War in North Carolina)* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 1991), 30.

supply line into North Carolina that was operating through the inlet. Such required the capture of the two forts located there, Forts Hatteras and Clark. Next the union aim was to block the channel with the “stone fleet,” requiring a number of old vessels loaded with rocks to be sunk in the channel, preventing the passage of blockade-runners.

Butler’s command consisted of the Second Regiment United States Artillery and parts of the Ninth and Twentieth Regiments New York Infantry, totaling just over 860 men. Stringham’s fleet consisted of ten vessels, the steam frigates *Minnesota* (47 guns) and *Wabash* (46); the sloop *Cumberland* (24); the sidewheel steamer *Susquehanna* (14); the gunboats included Rowan’s *Pawnee* (9), and the *Monticello* (3), and *Fanny* (2); the revenue cutter *Harriert Lane* (5); and two transport ships, the *Adalaide* and the *George Peabody*, carrying men and supplies.³

What follows is a detailed account of the Union efforts to secure the area. The Union force arrived off Hatteras on August 27, late enough in the day that they anchored for the night, out of range of the Confederate guns and well away from the dangerous shoals, and waited until morning to attack. Though the original plan had the ships concentrating their fire on Fort Hatteras to cover the landing of the Army personnel, it was quickly discovered that the constantly-moving sand in the channel’s current had made the water shallow enough that the ships drawing more than eighteen feet of water, including the *Minnesota* and the *Wabash*, could not advance any closer than a mile of the target. Butler thus made the decision to land the troops farther North, and have Stringham’s ships focus their fire on Fort Clark instead.

³ Fred M. Mallison, *The Civil War on the Outer Banks: A History of the Late Rebellion Along the Coast of North Carolina From Carteret to Currituck* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998), 35.

Stringham ordered the *Monitcello*, the *Pawnee*, and the *Harriet Lane* to cover the landing of the troops, while the other ships engaged Fort Clark. The smoothbore guns of the Confederate forces were very difficult to aim with enough accuracy to hit a target the size of a ship, and it was virtually impossible to hit one that was moving; the Union ships therefore steamed in a circle, “firing their guns in rotation as they came to bear on the enemy. This was the first recorded use of such a tactic by the U.S. Navy, and later it would be refined and used to great effect in the attack on Port Royal, South Carolina.”⁴ With the Union fleet in constant motion, Stringham later noted that the rebels’ shot fell short or passed over the ships.⁵ Eventually, the smoke from the ships’ fire had thickened so much that their visibility of the fort was obstructed completely, but by then their gunners had already pinpointed their target well enough to hit it consistently despite not being able to see it.

Landing the troops took longer than expected, owing to a southerly wind and high, rough surf. The ships were forced back by the bad weather and the ebbing tide; only 318 Union men had been landed on the beach, and they were armed with only two pieces of artillery, a 12-pound howitzer and a 12-pound rifled gun. To make matters worse, the carriage of the howitzer had been damaged during the landing, and much of their powder was soaked. The landed Union troops were cut off from the rest of the force, had no provisions, no access to drinking water, and were very exposed. Colonel Max Weber of the Twentieth New York later observed, “The condition of the troops was of course a very bad one. All of us were wet up to the shoulders, cut off entirely from the

⁴ Trotter, 34.

⁵ Stringham to Welles, 2 September 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 120-3.

fleet, with wet ammunition, and without any provisions; but still all had but one thought—to advance.”⁶

The officers of the fleet were rightfully fearful for their comrades and became even more concerned when a detachment of mounted men was seen charging from Fort Clark towards the stranded men. Without hesitation, the gunners on the nearest vessels fired a volley at the advancing cavalry, only to watch the horses scatter haphazardly into the windswept dunes. It was only after they had fired that they realized the group of hapless little animals “was no charge of Rebel cavalry but the stampeding of a herd of terrified Hatteras beach ponies seeking safety from the bombardment.”⁷

Colonel Weber, ranking officer ashore, set about making the best of the unfortunate situation that he and his men had found themselves in. They readied the guns as best they could, and spread out soaked ammunition and clothing to dry in the sun. At one point they saw a detachment of Confederate soldiers coming toward them across the beach, but they quickly turned and headed back to the fort. The fire from Fort Clark had ceased, but the Union fleet continued their bombardment. It was not until the Confederates from Fort Clark were seen beating a hasty retreat to Fort Hatteras that the Union men noticed that neither fort was flying a flag. Weber sent a small detachment of men to investigate Fort Clark, and upon their arrival they found it deserted, the guns spiked and all the ammunition used up. At about 2:00 in the afternoon, this small force

⁶ U.S. War Department, *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies During the War of the Rebellion*, 70 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1881-1901) [hereafter cited as *ORA*], Colonel Max Weber to Major General Benjamin F. Butler, 5 September 1861, Series I, Volume 4, 589-90.

⁷ David Stick, *The Outer Banks of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 122-4.

raised the Union flag over Fort Clark.⁸ Stringham, in a letter to Welles, noted that the raising of the flag “was done by a sailor from the U.S.S. *Pawnee*. (I regret I have not his name.) He was one of a few from that vessel out of their ship, their boat having been swamped in landing troops.”⁹ If Rowan knew which of his men was responsible for the deed, he made no note of it.

A few hours passed, and while no formal surrender had been made, the Confederate flag had been lowered over Fort Hatteras. Stringham ordered the *Monitcello* to enter the inlet and approach the Fort, but once inside the inlet and within range, the Union vessel was fired upon by rebels inside Fort Hatteras. Three Union ships, the *Minnesota*, the *Susquehanna*, and the *Pawnee*, responded in kind, and they continued their bombardment until sunset, long after the *Monticello* was out of range of the Fort’s guns. Once the sun was down, these three ships, along with the *Harriet Lane*, moved north up the coast to protect the Union troops, who remained on the beach for the night; Stringham ordered the larger vessels to haul offshore for the night.¹⁰ The soldiers on shore had built a sand battery in which to mount their guns, “and had opened on the vessels in the sound in communication with the fort, which seems to have materially disconcerted the enemy.”¹¹

Colonel W. F. Martin, the ranking Confederate officer present, had sent to Portsmouth for reinforcements the moment he had sighted the Union vessels off the coast. The only ship available at the time was a tiny pilot boat, however, and the order

⁸ Daniel Ammen, *The Navy in the Civil War: Volume II. The Coast* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1885), 167.

⁹ Stringham to Welles, 3 September 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 124-5.

¹⁰ Stringham to Welles, 2 September 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 120-3.

¹¹ Ammen, 168.

was not delivered until after the bombardment had begun.¹² Not until after dark on the 28th did more men arrive, including Commodore Samuel Barron, who was in charge of the naval forces of North Carolina and Virginia. Barron and the other senior officers “designed an assault on Fort Clark” for that night, but decided to wait until another regiment they were expecting from New Bern joined them.¹³ Unfortunately for them, they put off their only chance—slim thought it was—of salvaging the situation. The awaited force never came.

The following morning, the weather was milder, and Stringham ordered the *Monticello* and the *Pawnee* to make contact with the men on shore, and to “embark them if they wished to come off; if they did not, to provision them.”¹⁴ The other ships engaged Fort Hatteras, but when Stringham noted that much of their shot was falling short, he ordered them to use 15-second fuses only, with the 10-inch guns. “At 9:35 recommenced firing, our shot now falling in and around the battery with great effect.”¹⁵ Less than two hours later, at 11:10 A.M., Fort Hatteras raised a white flag of surrender, and Stringham ordered a cease-fire.

As Major-General Butler, aboard the *Fanny*, entered the inlet, the Confederate fleet fled up the Sound. Before ordering the surrender, Commodore Barron had ordered as many men as would fit on the *Winslow*, and ordered them to New Bern. The Confederate officers then sent Butler their terms of surrender, but Butler refused them, stating that he would accept nothing but an unconditional surrender, knowing that the

¹² Mallison, 38.

¹³ Commodore Samuel Barron to Mallory, 31 August 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 138-40.

¹⁴ Stringham to Welles, 2 September 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 120-3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Confederates had no other option left to them. The *Fanny* fired on the *Winslow*, but did not hit her. Commodore Barron, Colonel Martin, and Major Andrews were taken to the *Minnesota* by the *Fanny*, and articles of capitulation were drawn up. It stated that “the forces under the command of said Barron, Martin, and Andrews, and all munitions of war, arms, men, and property under the command of said Barron, Martin, and Andrews, be unconditionally surrendered to the Government of the United States in terms of full capitulation.”¹⁶ It was signed by the three Confederate officers, in addition to Butler and Stringham.

General Butler had been told that after the forts fell, he was to evacuate all of his troops. The victory having been won, however, he saw no sense in throwing away the strategic location that they had taken. Commodore Stringham, who had been commanded to block the inlets and sail home after the battle, knew that if the Union wished to conduct operations in the sounds, the inlet of Hatteras would be an invaluable asset. After conferring together, they agreed that the place could and should be held. Troops were left in the forts, and a few of the ships, including the *Pawnee*, were left to patrol the area. Within a few days, both commanders received orders to do just this.¹⁷

Once Hatteras Inlet was under the control of the Union, and Rowan had the opportunity to see the area, he informed Stringham and Welles that if their intent was to hold the area, then the vessels that had been loaded with stone to sink in the channel could be put to much better use transporting coal and other supplies to blockading vessels. Rowan noted that, “In my opinion it is a waste of money to sink vessels in the

¹⁶ Stringham to Welles, including articles of Confederate capitulation, 30 August 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 119-20.

¹⁷ Mallison, 37.

channel at the Bulkheads. The flats are quicksand and as soon as the current is interrupted at one point it will open up a channel in another.”¹⁸ Ammen, in his writings years later, stated bluntly, “every one acquainted with those waters knew that a few months at least would be sufficient for the *teredo navalis* (marine worm) to dispose of any timber that might be placed as an obstruction.”¹⁹

Butler, in a letter to Major General John E. Wool, expressed his opinion on the military value of Hatteras Inlet. He noted that the Union would now have easy access to the entire coast of Virginia and North Carolina. Any ship that could sail over the bar—and the passage could be widened and deepened, given the time and equipment necessary—would have a safe anchorage even in winter, when the weather outside the bar was perilous. The position gave them a base for offensive operations, both along the coast and inland. Echoing the words of the Confederacy’s Chief Engineer, Colonel Thompson, Butler called it “the key to the Albemarle.” He continued, stating, “As a depot for coaling and supplies for the blockading squadron it is invaluable. As a harbor for out coasting trade, or inlet from the winter storms or from pirates, it is of the first importance.”²⁰

Major-General Butler departed the battlefield on the *Adelaide* on August 30, and headed for Annapolis with the thirteen wounded prisoners from the battle. He stopped on the way at Fort Monroe, his old command, to report to Major-General John E. Wool.

¹⁸ Private Journal of Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy, Microfilm 180, *Papers of Stephen C. Rowan, August 27, 1826-March 28, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) [hereafter cited as “Rowan Papers, M180”], vol. 4, 24.

¹⁹ Ammen, 42.

²⁰ Ammen, 171.

After seeing the prisoners to Annapolis, he headed straight for Washington, very much desiring to be the first to report the victory. It was, after all, the first important victory of the war for the Union, despite the fact that it had been won primarily with naval force. Upon his arrival in Washington, he stopped first at Postmaster-General Blair's house, then at the home of Assistant Secretary of the Navy Fox, and they agreed that this knowledge was well worth waking President Lincoln over. When Lincoln learned that the men were there with news of the assault on Hatteras, he came down to speak with them immediately; he did not even bother to change out of his nightshirt. Fox hurriedly told him the news, and Lincoln grabbed him up and flew around the room in excitement. Butler wrote in his memoirs that the whole scene left him overcome "with irresistible merriment,"²¹ especially since Lincoln was so tall, and "Fox was about five feet nothing." According to Ayres, nothing excited Lincoln like good news from the front, and this was certainly some of the best news he had heard since the war began.²²

²¹ Benjamin Franklin Butler, *Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences of Major-General Benj. F. Butler* (Boston: The Barta Press, 1892), 287-8.

²² Stephen Cooper Ayres, "Sketch of the Life and Services of Vice Admiral Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy" (read before the Ohio Commandery of the Loyal Legion, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1910), 10.

IMPORTANCE OF THE UNION CAPTURE OF HATTERAS

This was a small engagement that at first glance does not seem to matter much when compared with the larger picture of the Civil War. But Hatteras Inlet was the gateway to the North Carolina Sounds, which would give the Union access to several important ports and coastal cities, including New Bern, Elizabeth City, and Edenton. The Sounds were also essentially the back door to Confederate-held ports in Virginia, particularly Norfolk, which was accessible from the Sounds through the canals. Less tangible, but no less important, results included the first application of the new naval tactic of continuous movement, which greatly lessened the advantage shore-based guns had over shipboard ones; it was the first combined Army/Navy action of the war, and its favorable outcome set a precedent for future joint operations; and it was the first implementation of the Naval Blockading Strategy, a good first step in establishing international recognition of the blockade.

Rowan, in obedience to Stringham's orders to him, patrolled the area around Hatteras Inlet and supervised the repair of the guns in the forts. He reported events and happenings to both Stringham and Welles, writing letters whenever anything of prospective importance occurred. He reported to Stringham on September 3, 1861, from Hatteras Inlet, that several men and a few families entered the Sound from the mouth of the Pungo River the day before in the schooner *Enterprise*; they told Rowan that they were Union men who could no longer remain in North Carolina due to Confederate activity. One of the men had been drafted into a company of cavalry, but had escaped and afterwards decided to take his family and leave the area. These men reported to

Rowan that: “Ten miles this side of Washington on the Pamlico river at Malls Point they met three steamers full of soldiers who hailed them and told them to return as they had evacuated Ocracoke, spiked the guns and destroyed the state property there.”¹

Rowan countered that when he passed near the island where the fort is located, and saw no men or any sign of them. Rowan was also informed by Colonel Hawkins of the U.S. Army that “he has received reliable information that the forts at Oregon Inlet have been destroyed and the Island abandoned.”² According to Rowan, all the evidence indicated that the men had been withdrawn from the surrounding areas to reinforce Roanoke Island, and that the Confederates were in the process of fortifying the southern end of the island as much as possible. Rowan also wrote to Welles relaying this information, including the statement that if they had “an organized force of small steamers we could ere this have destroyed a great portion of the commerce and been in possession of Roanoke Island which is the key to Norfolk and Albemarle Sound.”³ This was unfortunately a common theme in the letters of the naval officers of the area to the commanders and to Welles; the vessels capable of navigating the area were, for the entirety of the war, too few. Rowan noted that any ships sent to the area should not have a draft deeper than seven feet, due to the shallow water. More than once were ships sent to the Sounds that were of no use simply because the amount of water needed to float them was not to be had. Rowan complained:

¹ Private Journal of Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy, Microfilm 180, *Papers of Stephen C. Rowan, August 27, 1826-March 28, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) [hereafter cited as “Rowan Papers, M180”], vol. 4, 21.

² Ibid., vol. 4, 21-2.

³ Ibid., vol. 4, 22.

“The tug Tempest of Washington chartered for the expedition at \$100 per day, is useless to me in consequence of her draft of water 9 1/2 ft. I used her in putting down buoys on the bar which is the principle service that she has rendered. Five tugs of 4 to 5 ft draft can be obtained for this price and would render valuable service in this strong tide way and if armed with a howitzer would be very valuable in the sound.”⁴

A number of small schooners had been purchased by the government to sink in the channels to block them up, and Rowan again suggests that such vessels could be put to better use in bringing coal and other supplies.⁵

Rowan also availed himself of the opportunity to state his opinion of the importance of the area to Welles, a view that was common among the officers, Army and Navy alike, who were familiar with the area. Rowan argued that if the War Department’s aim was to operate offensively on the Southern coast, the following should be observed:

“troops can be encamped in large numbers on a wooded beach of fifteen miles in length with water I think in sufficient quantities by digging wells three feet deep. The line of operations can be extended at pleasure to Ocracoke and continued to Cape Lookout and Beaufort by means of the sound and Neuse river. Once in possession of Beaufort we have a fine harbor with 15 ft on the bar.”⁶

Rowan wrote several other letters, addressed to the Flag Officer, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, relaying information about the area and rumors heard from locals and pro-Union refugees, and also suggesting areas that would be vulnerable to Union attack. Rowan noted, as many other officers had, that attacks should be made on Roanoke Island, Beaufort, and New Bern; he advised the number of troops that would be necessary and the strategies best applicable. He also stated that their operations in the area had “spread such consternation through the state

⁴ Ibid., vol. 4, 28-9.

⁵ Ibid., vol. 4, 26.

⁶ Ibid., vol. 4, 23-4.

that ten regiments of North Carolina troops have been ordered home to protect their homes and soil,”⁷ and suggested that more aggressive activity would compel the state to withdraw even more men from Virginia, leaving it more vulnerable to Union attack.

Rowan commented on the locals in the area, indicating that “[f]rom the most reliable information I can obtain there are thousands of loyal men residing on the waters of this sound, who only want protection to make themselves heard and felt in this struggle.”⁸ He observed that most secessionists had left the area for the interior of the state, and that most of those remaining were of the poorer classes. He noted that many of the people who lived on the islands had their property destroyed in the Union bombardment or by the retreat of the Confederate forces in the area. In a letter to Stringham dated September 5th, 1861, Rowan wrote that many of the poorer people from the area had returned since Stringham’s departure and had taken the oath of allegiance to the Union. He adds, “I would suggest the propriety of giving these poor people a little flour; with this and the fish in the sound they can manage to subsist.”⁹

Soon after Hatteras Inlet and the surrounding area fell to the Union, Stringham’s command, formerly known as the Coast Blockading Squadron, was renamed the Atlantic Blockading Squadron. After Stringham’s resignation in September, it was split into two divisions—northern and southern. Command of the Northern division, responsible for the blockade north of the border between North and South Carolina, was given to Captain Louis M. Goldsborough. Upon assuming command in September, Goldsborough

⁷ Ibid., vol. 4, 26.

⁸ Ibid., vol. 4, 24.

⁹ Ibid., vol. 4, 27.

discovered “he had only thirteen vessels to cover the waters of North Carolina and Virginia, excluding the Potomac River.”¹⁰

¹⁰ John S. Carbone, *The Civil War In Coastal North Carolina* (Raleigh: Office of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2001), 6.

ROWAN AND THE UNION BLOCKADE: ROANOKE ISLAND

Despite advice from multiple high-ranking officers, Navy and Army alike, it was almost six months before a large-scale operation in the Sounds took place. Winfield Scott, architect of the Anaconda Plan, had fought in the Mexican War in the Gulf of Mexico and had a profound respect for the results that could be attained with a joint Army/Navy movement and had a working knowledge of amphibious landings. The Burnside Expedition was planned with this overall strategy in mind; the goal was to put an end to Confederate operations in the Sounds, including privateering and blockade running. The inland waters of North Carolina also harbored many potential places for the rebels to construct vessels, and it was known that the South was in the process of building several ironclads. “It became, therefore, important for the Government, not only to clear these sounds and their tributary waters of enemies, but to hold possession of them by a suitable force of our own.”¹

The ships that made up the Union squadron were a strange miscellany, and in a certain way, they represented one of the biggest changes that had occurred in the U.S. Navy: a heavily armed little fleet. All of these vessels, which had to have a shallow enough draft to make it over the bar, were considered small. Belying their size, several of them were equipped with 9-inch guns; at the time the war began, the heaviest broadside gun to be found in the English Navy was the 68-pounder—smaller than these same 9-inch guns. The Confederates on Roanoke Island were miserably unprepared. By

¹ Charles Boynton, *The History of the Navy During the Rebellion: Volume One* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1868), 377.

the time they realized what they were up against, the Confederates found it too late to do much more than dig in and pray.

The Confederates, short on men and artillery, had little choice when it came to preparing themselves for the Union attack; either they relinquished control of some of the smaller forts in order to hold the important position of Roanoke Island, or risk spreading their forces so thin that they stood no chance against the onslaught of the combined Union Army/Navy assault. It was with this in mind that the Confederates abandoned Ocracoke and Oregon Inlets and the fortifications there, and concentrated their forces on Roanoke Island.

The Naval force consisted of the *Philadelphia*, Goldsborough's flagship, the *Delaware*, commanded by Rowan, the *Henry Brinker*, *Hunchback*, *Morris*, *Southfield*, *Commodore Barney*, *Commodore Perry*, *Ceres*, *Granite*, *Hetzel*, *William Putnam*, and the *Howard*. Goldsborough had also ordered five other ships, the *Louisiana*, *Lockwood*, *Seymour*, *Shawsheen*, and *Whitehall* to meet them at Hatteras Inlet, where three additional ships, the *Stars and Stripes*, *Underwriter*, and *Valley City* were stationed and waiting. During the battle with force on Roanoke Island, Goldsborough placed all of the vessels in the naval fleet under the direct command of Rowan.²

The Army half of the expedition consisted of three brigades of men, headed by Brigadier Generals Jesse Reno, John G. Foster, and John Parke, totaling over 15,000 men. They, along with their horses, arms, and supplies, were to be transported by twelve

² U.S. Navy Department, *Official Record of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894-1922) [hereafter cited as *ORN*], Louis M. Goldsborough to Welles, 18 February 1862, Series I, Volume 6, 551-5.

steamers: *City of New York*, *Cossack*, *Eastern Queen*, *Eastern State*, *George Peabody*, *Guide*, *Louisiana*, *New York*, *Pocahontas*, *Union*, *Northerner*, and *New Brunswick*. In addition, the Army had on hand thirty-two sailing vessels, nine armed propeller-driven gunboats, and five floating batteries. Altogether the Army vessels mounted a total of forty-seven guns.³ The Army's transports remained under the command of Brigadier General Ambrose E. Burnside, which rankled Goldsborough; he believed that during joint operations, the Army should leave the sailing to the sailors. He expressed this opinion quite strongly in a letter to Fox, in which he stated that, "Duality, I assure you, will not answer."⁴

In addition to the Navy's armed vessels, the fleet also consisted of coal schooners and a number of Army transports; all told, sources indicate the number of vessels was over seventy, though most were intended to be used only as transports for men and supplies. There was much public speculation over whether many of the ships in the fleet were even seaworthy, and in an effort to boost morale among the men, when the force left Washington, General Burnside chose for his headquarters the smallest ship in the lot of them, the tug *Picket*. Early in January, Goldsborough wrote to Burnside that they should leave as soon as possible, since bad weather could delay the expedition further. He was also quick to point out that many of the Army's vessels would not do well in bad weather at sea. The Army convoy left Hampton Roads, after days of delays and last-minute

³ John S. Carbone, *The Civil War In Coastal North Carolina* (Raleigh: Office of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2001), 29.

⁴ Gustavus Vasa Fox, *Confidential Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox* (Hallendale, FL: New World Book Manufacturing Co., 1972 (reprint—1920)), 235.

preparations, on January 11, 1862, and as they were met by the Navy ships coming from Washington.

The ships reached Hatteras Inlet on January 13, just as a severe winter storm hit, as Goldsborough had feared. There was no anchorage outside of the bar that would have been safe, but any attempt “to enter the narrow, shallow, crooked channel of the inlet would only have invited destruction.”⁵ They were forced to weather the storm at sea.

The winter weather was merciless. Items not secured well enough were washed off the decks, the crews fought to keep control of the vessels, and eventually the threat of running into each other became so great that the ships were ordered to disperse and spread out until the severity of the weather lessened. For almost two weeks, the storms continued, one coming right on the tail of the previous. During lulls in the wind, ships would attempt the channel, and few of them succeeded in getting through. Several ships were lost during this time, swamped and sunk or run aground and smashed by the surf, including the Army transport *City of New York*, the Army gunboat *Zouave*, and the army steamer *Pocahontas*; the latter was driven ashore twenty miles north of Cape Hatteras, and of her cargo of 103 horses, only 19 were saved. Luckily, her crew of thirty men all survived.⁶ The weather did not abate until the 23rd, almost two weeks later.

Once past the inlet, the ships had to make it over what was called “the swash” or “the bulkhead”—a wide sandbar the ships had to cross on their way into Pamlico Sound. Either they had been misinformed about the amount of water on the bar, or the stormy winter weather had washed much more sand onto the swash; either way, they had been

⁵ Boyton, 379.

⁶ Goldsborough to Welles, including the notes of Henry Van Brunt, 10 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 582-93.

mistaken on the draft required of the ships to enter the sound. In addition, Army officials purchasing vessels for the expedition had, in a few instances, been lied to about the draft of the vessels being purchased. Most of the Navy vessels made it over the swash without much trouble, but many of the Army vessels simply drew too much water to make it over, even with lightening their loads.

According to Burnside, they had been led to believe that there was eight feet of water on the swash, when in reality there was closer to six. Even eight feet would have been a stretch for many of the vessels in the fleet; six was simply impossible for most. The channel had to be deepened. Burnside wrote that what saved the whole expedition was the swiftness of the current on the swash; when the tide rolled out, all of the water had to flow over the swash which, considering the amount of water, was quite narrow. Burnside described the process that these circumstances allowed them to utilize:

“Large vessels were sent ahead, under full steam, on the bar when the tide was running out, and then anchors were carried out by boats in advance, so as to hold the vessels in position. The swift current would wash the sand from under them and allow them to float, after which there were driven farther on by steam and anchored again, when the sand would again wash out from under them. This process was continued for days, until a broad channel of over eight feet was made, deep enough to allow the passage of the fleet into the sound.”⁷

On January 26, the Union forces managed to get their largest steamer over the barrier, and it anchored in the sound to await the rest of the vessels. Despite this success, it was not until February 4 that the entire fleet had finally made it over the swash.

Goldsborough was quick to note, in his report to Welles on January 29 that the delay was due to the Army vessels, and not those of the Navy, and that this had been the

⁷ Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, editors, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York: The Century Co., 1887), 666.

case since the 19th. He wrote that if the Army troops were not absolutely necessary for the conquest of the island and for occupational purposes afterward, “I should have moved off alone with my own branch of the expedition more than a week ago.”⁸ By the time all of the vessels were finally over the swash and into Pamlico Sound on February 4, the adverse weather and the issues with the draft of the vessels had cost the Union force nearly a month in delays.

Though the Confederates knew that an attack on Roanoke Island was imminent, little was done to prepare for it. Brigadier General D. H. Hill had been entrusted with the defense of Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds; he had repeatedly insisted that more men were needed, and better arms, but the Confederate government did very little to help. Confederate forces were stretched too thin as it was, and President Davis believed it would be foolish to withdraw troops from Virginia to defend the North Carolina coast. Hill did his best he could with what he had. He ordered a line of earthworks to be constructed across the island and a fort to be relocated to the southern half of the island, but he was transferred back to Virginia before these orders were carried out.⁹ Brigadier General Henry A. Wise was then given charge of the area from Norfolk to Roanoke Island. He, too, lobbied the government for additional men and artillery for the defense of the area, even traveling to Richmond himself when Burnside’s forces were tenaciously inching their way into Pamlico Sound. Wise was also denied assistance.

⁸ Goldsborough to Welles, 29 January 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 536-7.

⁹ Carbone, 33.

Moreover, Wise had surveyed the island personally, and stated bluntly in a report that “Not a fort was in the right position”¹⁰; in this he was very much in agreement with General Hill on the folly of not having a single gun on the southern half of the island. He stated that if the five batteries had been placed on the islands in the marshes at the channel through which the Union fleet would eventually pass, and flanking the channel on the eastern side of the island, the Confederacy would have had every possible approach to the island guarded and would have been able to prevent any landing on the island.

While Wise was unimpressed with Lynch’s Mosquito Fleet, he regarded the two North Carolina regiments on the island, the Eighth and the Thirty-first, along with three companies from the Seventeenth, as woefully inadequate. He reported later than when he arrived on the island, the infantry was “undrilled, unpaid, not sufficiently clothed and quartered, and were miserably armed with old flint muskets in bad order.” He reported that the defenses on the island “were a sad farce of ignorance and neglect combined,” and inexcusably weak. He characterized Lynch’s “Mossquito Fleet” as nothing but “imbecile gunboats.”¹¹

The lack of defenses on the entire southern half of the island is perhaps the most shocking neglect the Confederates made in terms of preparation. Neither Hill nor Wise could fathom why all of the forts were placed on the northern half, and Wise made particular note of the singular battery on the eastern side. He stated that the Union “could

¹⁰ U.S. War Department, *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies During the War of the Rebellion*, 70 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1881-1901) [hereafter cited as *ORA*], report of Henry A. Wise, 8 January 1862, Series I, Volume 9, 129-30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

have taken the island in two hours easier than they did in two days”¹² had they only landed on the eastern side of the island in the rear of all the batteries. The only defense located on that side of the island, Ballast Point, was equipped with only two guns.¹³

The rebels mistakenly assumed there was only one way for the enemy to approach once ashore: along the road leading over the narrowest stretch of the island between Ashby’s Harbor, where the Union soldiers landed, and Fort Bartow at Pork Point. The little battery there had only three guns, but the Confederates were unconcerned because they believed the territory along either side of the road was impenetrable; both sides were flanked by dense swamp, and trees were felled directly along the road. The rebels believed the enemy would be forced to approach directly up the road and would be bottlenecked in the face of their guns. This was their undoing; two Union Army officers led forces up either side of the road through the swamp, while the main force advanced directly up the road. Though their movements were not coordinated, the two forces emerged almost simultaneously from the swamp and attacked in a pincer movement that dissolved the Confederate defense and forced them to retreat.

Meanwhile, the defenses along the water were faced with the Union Navy. There were four Confederate forts on the western side of the island: Fort Bartow, on Pork Point, mounting eight 32-pounder smooth-bores and one 68-pounder rifled gun; Fort Huger, on Wier’s Point, mounting ten 32-pounder smooth-bores and two 68-pounder rifles; Fort Blanchard, between the two, mounting four 32-pounder smooth-bores; and Fort Forrest, situated on the mainland across Croatan Sound opposite Fort Blanchard. Fort Forrest had

¹² Ibid.

¹³ John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 73.

been built to serve primarily as a defense of the obstructions that blocked Croatan Sound, which consisted of two rows of sunken vessels and piles placed at an angle. The Confederate Navy force, drawn up behind these obstructions, consisted of eight gunboats mounting a total of seventeen guns, and was commanded by Commander Lynch.

Despite the fact that Wise maintained the batteries were misplaced, they were still arranged in a manner that defended that particular area well. The rebels were experienced with the terrain and had their guns trained on the areas where the Union Navy would be forced to sail through the sound. The shallow water and the narrow strait left little room for maneuverability, even for vessels considered small. In addition, several of the Union vessels, though well-armed, were not sturdy enough to endure the fire of the rebels' heavy guns, and all had suffered from the journey and its necessary extended exposure to the elements, as had the men.

Before the Union advance, Goldsborough had reported to Welles that "We have no very recent intelligence from Roanoke Island, nor can we, despite our efforts, procure any."¹⁴ There was concern over whether or not the rebels had managed to place artillery in two specific areas that had previously been undefended: at the marshes, where the navigable waterway was narrow, and near Ashby's Harbor or Sandy Point (roughly half a mile north), where they intended to land the Army. Rowan, commanding the naval division under Goldsborough, wrote to his commanding officers on February 2nd regarding their advance; he warned them of the possibility of meeting the enemy vessels near the marshes, and the possibility of a battery placed at the narrow part of the river. He included a map of the area, on which he had marked the location where they feared a

¹⁴ Goldsborough to Welles, 29 January 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 536-7.

battery might be located and the route the vessels were to take and in what manner.

Rowan wrote that his objective was,

“to preserve the order of advance in three columns abreast till we approach the pass, where the leaders of the columns will so arrange themselves on a bow and quarter bearing on the *Stars and Stripes* which will enable each of the three vessels to keep up a fire on the fort in approaching and passing it. Having passed the battery, the order abreast will be restored, after which we must be governed by circumstances.”¹⁵

Early on the morning of the 5th of February, the vessels prepared to advance, the Navy vessels leading the way in the previously arranged three columns, and the Army transports following behind. The three columns were headed by Lieutenant-Commanding Reed Werden in the USS *Stars and Stripes*, Lieutenant-Commanding A. Murray in the USS *Louisiana*, and Lieutenant-Commanding H.K. Davenport in the USS *Hetzel*. Commander Rowan, Goldsborough’s tactical commander, had chosen the *Delaware*, one of the smallest armed vessels in the fleet, as his flag-ship, and was on board that vessel. Due to the complications of moving so large a force, progress was slow, and the vessels anchored, still in formation, off Stumpy Point near sundown.

The following morning was foggy, and though visibility was limited they pressed forward. Goldsborough moved from the *Philadelphia* to the *Southfield* before they left their anchorage, a move that he had notified Rowan about in a previous letter.¹⁶ Two of the Navy’s smaller vessels, the *Putnam* and the *Ceres*, steamed a mile or so ahead of the main body of the fleet, on the lookout for enemy vessels and obstructions that might be concealed in the water. At roughly nine in the morning, Goldsborough reported, the

¹⁵ Rowan to commanding officers of fleet (Werden, Murray, and Davenport), 2 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 543.

¹⁶ Goldsborough to Rowan, 30 January 1861, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 537-8.

weather cleared just long enough for them to see the enemy's vessels anchored close to the shore of the island, near Fort Blanchard. An hour and a half later the weather worsened, and the combination of the fog, wind and rain forced them to anchor for the night, still as near in formation as they could be. Goldsborough stated that "one of the enemy's steamers approached the marshes for the purpose, no doubt, of reconnoitering our force. She met with no opposition from us, simply because we were not unwilling that she should accomplish her wishes."¹⁷

By the next morning, the weather had cleared, and the signal was given once again to move. The *Underwriter* was sent ahead in addition to the *Ceres* and the *Putnam*, for the purpose of determining whether or not a battery had been placed on Sandy Point, near where they intended to land the Army. On approaching the marshes at the southern tip of the island it was discovered that, contrary to their fear, no fortifications of any kind had been erected there. As the passage was narrow enough that only two ships abreast could pass at one time, two of the columns steamed ahead through the channel into Croatan Sound, and then waited for the third, as Rowan had previously ordered them to do if the point was unguarded.

The enemy vessels, Commodore Lynch's "Mosquito Fleet", were still drawn up where they had been sighted previously, behind a double row of obstructions that stretched across the sound. These were composed of sunken vessels and pilings set at a 45-degree angle and cut off below the waterline. As the Union vessels came into view, one of the Confederate steamers fired a single shot, probably intended as a warning for the troops ashore that the Union was advancing. The *Underwriter*, well ahead of the

¹⁷ Goldsborough to Welles, 18 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 550-5.

main body, fired at Sandy Point, and when she received no answer, signaled that there was no battery there.¹⁸ Had the Confederates placed fortifications at that point, the landing of the Union Army would have been much more difficult.

The combined force of Navy and Army vessels moved slowly forward, and began to fire on the enemy vessels, the battery located between Pork and Wier Points, and the battery positioned on Redstone Point, though most of their fire was focused on Fort Bartow on Pork Point. A letter from Colonel Shaw, a replacement for Wise, who had fallen ill, revealed that at that time, the only battery able to return fire was Fort Bartow, and that “at no time could more than four guns of that battery be brought to bear upon the enemy, and that when he left, at 4 p.m., two of the guns there had been disabled.”¹⁹ At about 1:30, Goldsborough reported that the barracks behind Fort Bartow caught fire due to the shelling. By this point, the ships had all moved into prime positions for firing on the fortifications, and by 3:00 PM the Army transports were moving in for the landing.

Goldsborough reported shallow water even at a mile distant; he reported, “scarcely a general depth at low water of more than 7 feet is to be found. With one or two exceptions none of our vessels drew less than 7 feet, and some of them drew rather more than 8.”²⁰ Owing to the shallow water, most of the Navy vessels were forced to remain more than a mile out, but the little *Delaware*, with Rowan on board, drew a mere six feet of water, and was able to get much closer.²¹ Goldsborough reported that the landing site of Ashby’s Harbor was guarded by a group of rebels with a field battery, but

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Charles B. Duffield to Benjamin Huger, 8 February 1862, in *ORA*, ser. I, vol. 9, 153-4.

²⁰ Goldsborough to Welles, 18 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 550-5.

²¹ Naval Historical Center. “Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships.” <http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/d3/delaware-iv.htm>

Rowan, who had positioned the *Delaware* just south of Pork Point, “immediately turned her guns toward the harbor, and with some 9-inch shrapnels soon cleared the way.”²²

At 4:30, the battery from the fort was silenced, the Confederate fleet retreated out of the line of fire, and the Union Army immediately began to land their force. Each of Burnside’s three brigades were equipped with a shallow-draft, quick little steamer, which each speedily towed around twenty surfboats, packed with as many soldiers (and as few sailors to maximize the force being landed) as each craft could manage, in a long line toward the shore. When signaled, the surfboats cast off the towline, and used their momentum to arc toward the shore in a line, and as soon as the water was shallow enough, the men leaped out of the boats, leaving the sailors to return the surfboats to the main naval force. General Burnside noted in his report,

“In less than twenty minutes from the time the boats reached the shore 4,000 of our men were passing over the marshes at a double-quick and forming in most perfect order on the dry land near the house; and I beg leave to say that I never witnessed a more beautiful sight than that presented by the approach of these vessels to the shore and the landing and forming of the troops.”²³

This landing was covered by Rowan’s guns from the *Delaware* and by Captain T. P. Ives aboard the *Picket*. Brigadier General John G. Foster, commanding one of the brigades, wrote in his report, regarding Rowan and Ives covering the landing, “This was

²² Goldsborough to Welles, 18 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 550-5

²³ Ambrose E. Burnside to Lorenzo Thomas, 14 February 1862, in *ORA*, ser. I, vol. 9, 75-81.

handsomely done, although it required but a few shells to accelerate the retreat of the force from Ashbys.”²⁴

At 5:00, the rebel batteries began firing again, and the enemy vessels reappeared, but in short order the Union Naval vessels had them again retreating, and the Confederate steamer *Curlew*, having been injured in the engagement, was forced to take refuge under the guns of the Fort Forrest on Redstone Point. The Captain of the vessel, Commander Thomas T. Hunter, had intended on grounding her to keep her from sinking; in this he succeeded, but, unfortunately for the Confederates, he grounded her directly in front of the Fort, rendering several of her guns useless against the enemy.²⁵ The *Forrest* was also forced to retire from the battle, having had her propeller displaced,²⁶ and the rest remained engaged until they ran out of ammunition, at which point Commodore Lynch, unable to find ammunition on the island, left for Elizabeth City, with the *Forrest* in tow, intending to resupply and return. There he found enough ammunition to arm two of his steamers, but as he was heading back on the 9th, he learned that Roanoke Island had been lost.²⁷

Six of the Navy’s launches landed their howitzers under the command of Midshipman Benjamin H. Porter and joined the army. When the sun began to set, Goldsborough ordered a cease-fire; the fire from the battery at Pork Point had abated, and

²⁴ John G. Foster to Lewis Richmond, 9 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 9, 85-88.

²⁵ Barrett, 77.

²⁶ William F. Lynch to Mallory, 18 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 594-97.

²⁷ Ibid.

he did not wish to waste ammunition. Rowan, in the *Delaware*, landed 800 men from the *Hossack* around 10:00 PM, and by midnight roughly 10,000 Union troops were ashore.²⁸

The Army spent a wet and miserable night ashore, and, as Burnside had ordered, was up and moving early the next morning. Since the path the Army was to take would undoubtedly led them straight through the Navy's line of fire, Burnside and Goldsborough had agreed the night before that, until the latter had received word that the men were out of range, he would give no order for the Navy's vessels to fire upon the rebels.²⁹ However, Goldsborough reported that by 9:00 AM a continuous fire could be heard coming from the interior of the island, and, assuming that this meant the Union men were well out of the way, he gave the order to engage the forts again without waiting for word from Burnside. When the sounds of fire from the interior abated, he gave the order to cease firing, "taking it for granted that our troops were carrying everything before them, and thus fast approaching the rear of the batteries."³⁰ Goldsborough was about to order to resume firing, but Rowan came aboard the ship and recommended that they desist for the time being.³¹

Meanwhile, the Navy turned their focus on the obstructions across the Sound and on Fort Forrest, which had its eight guns positioned to defend them. The steamer *Curlew* was still grounded in front of the fort, masking several of its guns from firing on the naval force behind the line of obstructions, but vessels crossing the barricade could be

²⁸ Goldsborough to Welles, 18 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 550-5.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

vulnerable to others. Crossing could also put the vessels in range of the other batteries on the shore of Roanoke Island. As soon as Goldsborough felt it safe to make the attempt, he gave the order for the *Underwriter*, *Valley City*, *Seymour*, *Lockwood*, *Ceres*, *Shawsheen*, *Putnum*, *Whitehead*, and *Brinker* to attempt to find a way over; once one ship found a navigable way across, the rest quickly followed, leading the way for the Navy's advance into Albemarle Sound. Almost simultaneously, Goldsborough reported, "the American flag was hoisted over the battery at Pork Point, and in a few minutes afterward the enemy himself fired the works at Redstone Point, and also the steamer *Curlew*. Both blew up in the early part of the evening."³² Roanoke Island had been won.

Confederate Brigadier General Wise in describing the loss, was quoted thusly:

"[S]uch is the importance and value, in a military point of view, of Roanoke Island, that it ought to have been defended by all the means in the power of the Government. It was the key to all the rear defenses of Norfolk. It unlocked two sounds (Albemarle and Currituck); eight rivers (the North, West Pasquotank, Perquimans, Little, Chowan, Roanoke, and Alligator); four canals (the Albemarle and Chesapeake, Dismal Swamp, Northwest, and Suffolk); and two railroads (the Petersburg and Norfolk and the Seaboard and Roanoke). It guarded more than four-fifths of all Norfolk's supplies of corn, pork, and forage, and it cut the command of General Huger off from all of its most efficient transportation. It endangers the subsistence of his whole army, threatens the navy-yard at Gosport, and to cut off Norfolk from Richmond, and both from railroad communications with the South. It lodges the enemy in a safe harbor from the storms of Hatteras, gives them a rendezvous, and large, rich range of supplies, and the command of the seaboard from Oregon Inlet to Cape Henry. It should have been defended at the expense of 20,000 men and of many millions of dollars."³³

³² Ibid.

³³ Report of the investigating Committee in the Confederate House of Representatives, regarding the capitulation of Roanoke Island, 10 February 1862, in *ORA*, ser. I, vol. 9, 183-91.

As it was, the island had fallen to the Union at surprisingly little cost of life. The Army reported 37 men killed, 214 wounded, and 13 missing;³⁴ and the Navy 6 killed, 17 wounded, and 2 missing.³⁵ Goldsborough noted that, given the heat of the enemy's fire and the number of times the vessels had been struck, it was remarkable that there were not many more casualties. Noting the same reasons, he stated that it was equally remarkable that the ships themselves had not suffered more. He was generous in his commendations of the officers and men, but none more so than Commanders Rowan and Case:

“It is really difficult for me to state in adequate terms how largely I feel myself indebted to Commanders Rowan and Case for their constant and signal services throughout, from the very inception of the expedition to the consummation of the achievement in view. They, hand in hand, with their marked ability and sound sense, and in the absence of all ordinary facilities, brought about, at Hampton Roads, the arming, manning, and equipment of the many vessels sent to us, from necessity, in an unprepared condition; and subsequently, they both labored most conspicuously and faithfully, in their respective spheres of action, to vanquish difficulties at the inlet and the enemy at Roanoke. In short, their assistance to me has been invaluable.”³⁶

The conquest of Roanoke Island on February 7-8, 1862, left Wilmington the only Confederate port on the entire North Carolina coast that had not been taken by the Union. Combined with Flag Officer Du Pont's victory along the coast of Florida and Georgia shortly after, this left only Charleston and Wilmington open to blockade runners. Goldsborough wasted no time in tying up loose ends, the most obvious of which was Commodore Lynch's Mosquito Fleet, which had disappeared the day before to acquire more ammunition for his guns, missing the surrender of Roanoke Island.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Goldsborough to Welles, 18 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 550-5.

³⁶ Ibid.

ROWAN'S DEFEAT OF THE "MOSQUITO FLEET"

Rowan, following the fall of Roanoke Island, set off through Albemarle Sound in pursuit of Lynch's fleet. He took with him all the ammunition they could scrape together, and fourteen vessels of the Naval force, all crafts with, he hoped, light enough draft for them to be navigable in the river. They were, with their commanders, the *Louisiana*, Lieutenant Commanding Murray; the *Hetzel*, Lieutenant Commanding Davenport; the *Underwriter*, Lieutenant Commanding Jeffers; the *Delaware*, Lieutenant Commanding Quackenbush; the *Commodore Perry*, Lieutenant Commanding Flusser; the *Valley City*, Lieutenant Commanding Chaplin; the *Morse*, Acting Master Hays; the *Seymour*, Acting Master Wells; the *Whitehead*, Acting Master French; the *Lockwood*, Acting Master Graves; the *Ceres*, Acting Master MacDiarmid; the *Shawsheen*, Acting Master Woodward; the *Brinker*, Acting Master Giddings; the *Putnam*, Acting Master Hotchkiss. Rowan kept the doughty *Delaware* as his flagship, and commanded the force from that vessel.¹

As they proceeded through Albemarle Sound toward the river, two enemy steamers were sighted along the shore. Lynch's report reveals that these two steamers were the *Sea Bird* and the *Appomatox*, with Lynch himself commanding the former.² Rowan gave the order to pursue them, but after entering the Pasquotank River he

¹ U.S. Navy Department, *Official Record of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894-1922) [hereafter cited as *ORN*], Rowan to Goldsborough, 11 February 1862, Series I, Volume 6, 606-9; see also Private Journal of Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy, Microfilm 180, *Papers of Stephen C. Rowan, August 27, 1826-March 28, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) [hereafter cited as "Rowan Papers, M180"], vol. 4, 44.

² Lynch to Mallory, 18 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 594-97.

withdrew the order; night was falling and he desired to keep the fleet together as much as possible. They steamed over the bar, slowly so as to keep everyone together, and made their way upstream to within ten miles of Fort Cobb, on Cobbs Point, and at around 8:00 PM they anchored for the night. Lynch continued on the *Elizabeth City* and made what preparations he could for the battle he knew was coming.

That night Rowan called all of the commanding officers to his ship, and he informed them that the enemy ships had either drawn up behind the battery on Cobbs Point and were preparing to fight, or else they had fled to Norfolk by way of the canal. Rowan reminded them of their low ammunition supply, having but twenty rounds for each gun. He laid out a plan that would bring them in close to the enemy to reconnoiter; no one was to fire a shot until the order was given. To further economize ammunition, Rowan directed that each vessel, in approaching the enemy, “should run him down and engage him hand to hand.”³

At sunrise the next morning, the flotilla proceeded up the river in the manner Rowan had ordered the night before; the *Underwriter*, the *Perry*, the *Morse*, and the *Delaware* led the way, the *Ceres* on the right flank, with the rest of the force following behind. At 8:30 AM, the enemy fleet was sighted, drawn up behind the Fort Cobb battery as had been suspected. The seven vessels were lined up across the river in front of the town, with the schooner *Black Warrior* moored on the far side of the river from the Fort. As soon as the Union flotilla was within range, the fort and gunboats of the enemy opened fire on them, but none was returned, as Rowan had commanded. “Our force however,” Rowan wrote, “moved on silently and steadily, shot and shell passing over the

³ Rowan to Goldsborough, 11 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 606-9.

vessels in advance and falling thick and fast among the vessels in the main columns.”

When Rowan’s forces came within three-quarters of a mile of the battery, he signaled, “‘Dash at the enemy.’ Our fire was then opened with telling effect, and our vessels put to their utmost speed.”⁴

The Confederates had known, thanks to Commodore Lynch's narrow escape the day before, that the Union flotilla was on its way, and who was in command. Captain William Harwar Parker of the *Beaufort* recollected later, "Commodore Stephen C. Rowan was in command of the Federal vessels, and we knew him to be a dashing officer."⁵ They had done what they could to prepare, dividing their limited supply of ammunition as equally as possible between the vessels, and had anchored in their positions across the river. Not much else could be done. When it was reported to Lynch that Rowan's force had been sighted coming up the river, he hastened to Fort Cobb, which he found was not garrisoned, and manned by a civilian and a mere seven militiamen. "As the battery was our principal reliance, and the enemy must pass it before reaching the gunboats, I determined to defend it in person."⁶ He sent orders to Lieutenant Commanding Parker of the *Beaufort*, and told him to bring to the battery his ammunition, officers and crew, save for just enough to take the *Beaufort* up the canal. In his writings later in life, Parker recollected his response, and the answer of the messenger: "'Where the devil,' I asked, 'are the men who were in the fort?' 'All run away'."⁷ Of the men Lynch found manning the battery, only the civilian remained; the militiamen deserted, leaving Lynch and the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ William Howard Parker, *Recollections of a Naval Officer, 1841-1865* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1883), 255.

⁶ Lynch to Mallory, 18 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 594-97.

⁷ Parker, 256.

men from the *Beaufort* with enough manpower to bring only two of the 32-pounders to bear on the advancing Union vessels.

Lynch reported, "The enemy advanced very boldly and, contrary to my expectation, instead of taking position as he did at Roanoke island for the purpose of shelling the battery, he continued to press on; in one hour and five minutes succeeded in passing it, and, with full compliments of men, closed upon our half manned gunboats."⁸ Once the Union vessels were past the battery, the *Valley City* and the *Whitehead* turned and opened on the fort from behind, as Rowan had ordered them to do. Lynch spiked the guns and withdrew; the guns had been mounted in such a way that they could not be turned to face upstream.

Lynch had ordered his men to remain until their ammunition ran out, and then to attempt to escape through the canals. If they could not escape, they were to burn their signal books, set fire to the vessels, and abandon ship. In the face of Rowan's aggressive advance, however, the rebel forces panicked. The Union flotilla tore relentlessly into the Confederate squadron. "The enemy seemed to become demoralized at this unexpected and determined movement." The crew of the *Black Warrior* set her on fire and abandoned her. The *Commodore Perry* ran down Lynch's flagship the *Seabird* and rammed her, sinking her; her officers and crew were taken prisoner. The *Ellis* was boarded by the crew of the *Ceres*, and was captured, in part thanks to a slave who had been pressed into serving as a coal heaver on the vessel; Lieutenant Commander J. W. Cooke had ordered the vessel to be set on fire and abandoned, but the slave prevented the

⁸ Lynch to Mallory, 18 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 594-97.

vessel's destruction.⁹ The *Fanny* was run aground by her crew, who set fire to the ship before abandoning her; despite the ship being in flames, men from the *Delaware* boarded her for the purpose of retrieving the Confederate flag the fleeing rebels had left flying. The *Appomattox* and the *Beaufort* managed to escape up the canal, but only the *Beaufort* made it to Norfolk; Captain Sims, on making it to the canal's lock, found that his vessel was a mere two inches too wide to make it through. Sims ordered the ship burned.¹⁰

Rowan led several of the ships to the city, and they sighted a battery of field artillery fleeing. A party from the Union flotilla sent to investigate came upon "a mounted artillery officer of the Wise Legion, who, in obedience to orders from General Henningsen, was compelling the defenseless people to set fire to the houses... No other houses were destroyed besides those set on fire under the direction of Lieutenant Scroggs, of the Wise Legion."¹¹ Scroggs was arrested and brought to Rowan, but not before he had managed to convince the inhabitants to set several buildings on fire. "A curious incident, truly, in war," Ammen wrote, "when the enemy becomes the protector against the senseless injuries inflicted by pretended friends."¹² Rowan's force prevented any other buildings from being set on or catching fire, but he did not allow the men to attempt to put out the fires that had already been set, knowing that "we would be charged with vandalism as incendiaries."¹³

⁹ J.W. Cooke to Lynch, 16 April 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 597-8.

¹⁰ Parker, 259.

¹¹ Rowan to Goldsborough, 11 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 606-9.

¹² Daniel Ammen, *The Navy in the Civil War: Volume II. The Coast* (New York: Charles Schribner's Sons, 1885), 185.

¹³ Rowan to Goldsborough, 11 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 606-9.

Rowan ordered the Confederate storehouses emptied, and fresh beef, bread, and flour were taken. Three vessels, including the *Forrest*, which had been disabled during the battle at Roanoke Island, were found at the shipyard, and, none being worth salvaging, were burned. An attempt was made to save both the *Fanny* and the *Black Warrior*, but to no avail. The Union force salvaged what they could from the wrecks, and fished up artillery from the sunken vessels. Rowan sent engineers to destroy the machinery and boilers in the shipyard, along with the railway line. Lieutenant Commanding Flusser was ordered to destroy the battery at Cobbs Point, which was done after he had everything of value removed, including armament and supplies, all of which, Rowan stated, had been taken from the Norfolk Navy Yard.

Rowan received much praise for this bold and decisive victory. Daniel Ammen, naval historian and a Rear Admiral who fought in the Civil War himself, stated, "Nothing more brilliant in naval "dash" occurred during the entire civil war than appears in this attack."¹⁴ Admiral David Porter was also impressed, and wrote in his history of the Civil War,

"Although this was comparatively a small affair, it was one of the best conceived and best executed battles of the war... The attack of the Union vessels was like the spring of a pack of greyhounds upon a brood of foxes—it was just such a scene as naval officers delight in."¹⁵

Rowan was also very pleased with the conduct of his commanders, and after the battle he issued a commendatory order to the entire little fleet:

¹⁴ Ammen, 185.

¹⁵ David Dixon Porter, *The Naval History of the Civil War* (New York: The Sherman Publishing Company, 1886), 116.

“The commander of the flotilla in Albemarle Sound avails himself of the earliest moment to make a public acknowledgment of the coolness, gallantry, and skill displayed by the officers and men under his command in the capture and destruction of the enemy’s battery and squadron at Cobbs Point.

“The strict observance of the plan of attack, and the steady but onward course of the ships, without returning a shot until within three-quarters of a mile of the fort, excited the admiration of our enemies.

“The undersigned is particularly gratified at the evidence of the high discipline of the crews in refraining from trespassing in the slightest degree upon the private property of defenseless people in a defenseless town. The generous offer to go on shore and extinguish the flames applied by the torch of a vandal soldiery upon the houses of their own defenseless women and children is a striking evidence of the justness of our cause, and must have its effect in teaching our deluded countrymen a lesson in humanity and civilization.”¹⁶

One incident in particular that Rowan made special note of was the action of John Davis, the gunner’s mate of the *Valley City*, who prevented an open barrel of gunpowder from igniting by sitting on it. Lieutenant Commander Chaplin, in his report of the engagement, wrote,

“I take pleasure in again bearing testimony to the gallant conduct of the officers and crew of this vessel; and particularly I desire to bring under your notice the cool intrepidity and thorough practical seaman-ship displayed by Masters Mate J. A. J. Brooks in maneuvering this vessel while under the hottest of the enemys [sic] fire. Also to the undaunted presence of mind of the gunners mate, John Davis, who, while at his station in the magazine, when the shell penetrated the side and ignited the berth deck, as above reported, did cover a barrel of powder with his own person, thereby preventing an explosion, while at the same time passing powder, providing for the gun divisions on the upper deck.”¹⁷

Directly following the defeat of the Confederate squadron and the capture of Elizabeth City, Rowan wrote to Goldsborough reporting the victory. He sent word by way of the newly captured *Ellis*, which he had placed under the command of Acting

¹⁶ Commendatory order of Commander Rowan, 11 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 621-2.

¹⁷ J.C. Chaplin to Rowan, 10 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 614-5.

Master Chase of the *Delaware*, “whom I hope you will confirm in the command.”¹⁸

He stated that the *Ellis* was the only ship from the enemy squadron that they were able to capture, along with the captain of that ship and several other prisoners. He also stated that he intended to leave a small force at Elizabeth City and “visit the canals and take a look into the other places before I return.”¹⁹

Flag Officer Goldsborough was appointed commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, and he left Rowan in charge of the Federal Flotilla in the Sounds of North Carolina. Two days after the capture of Elizabeth City, on February 12, 1862, Rowan sent a force of four ships, consisting of the *Underwriter*, the *Commodore Perry*, and the *Lockwood*, and led by Lieutenant Murray of the *Louisiana*, to occupy Edenton. The few Confederate troops that were there, estimated to be between 100 and 300 men from a flying artillery regiment, left before Union forces landed. Many of the townspeople followed not far behind, as a result of “a vile rumor having been put in circulation by the panic-stricken enemy that our havoc was indiscriminate at Elizabeth.”²⁰ Murray destroyed eight old cannon and a schooner that was on the stocks, and talked with the remaining townsmen, who claimed to be Union men. They collected a half-dozen bales of cotton that had been left in the custom house by the wharf. Finding no evidence of other Confederate stores, they headed back to report to Rowan. On the way they encountered two schooners, and captured them both, one of which was carrying a cargo of 4,000 bushels of corn.²¹

¹⁸ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 39.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ A. Murray to Rowan, 12 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 637-8.

²¹ Ibid.

The following morning, Rowan sent Lieutenant Commanding Jeffers of the *Lockwood* to obstruct the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal, plus the *Shawsheen* and the *Whitehead*. They towed with them two schooners to sink in the canal. When they arrived at the lock, they could see several Confederate vessels a little over a mile up the canal, but found that the mouth of it had already been blocked by the Confederates, who were afraid that the Union fleet would pursue them. The *Whitehead* fired on them with a IX-inch gun, and they disappeared. A local revealed that the men, roughly 600 in number, were of the Wise Legion, commanded by Wise himself. The obstructions, a sunken schooner and a row of pilings, were inspected, along with “a fine, large dredging machine” that was in the process of sinking. It had been “entirely destroyed by the working party, the hull above water burned and entirely consumed.”²² These obstructions were fortified with the two schooners, gathered supplies and tools left by the fleeing rebels, and headed for the mouth of the North River to report.

Rowan’s report to Goldsborough described both incidents, and included the recommendation that Lieutenant Commanding Jeffers be sent to destroy two reported salt works in Currituck Sound.²³ On the 18th, Goldsborough ordered Jeffers to do so. The latter was supplied with an Army side-wheel steamer and two armed launches, manned by an Army force of around 300 men.²⁴ Jeffers reported of the expedition that the rumors of the salt works had been “greatly exaggerated... a few miserable sheds and hovels sheltered some kettles in which the people of the surrounding country make a small

²² William K. Jeffers to Murray, 14 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 638-9.

²³ Rowan to Goldsborough, 13 February, 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 637.

²⁴ Goldsborough to Welles, 20 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 635-6.

supply, principally for their own use.”²⁵ Jeffers stated that these “salt works” could be destroyed with ease, if Goldsborough desired it, but the fact that he sought to confirm his orders indicates that he did not believe that it needed to be accomplished. He also stated in the same report that the inhabitants of the area were undoubtedly Unionist, but that they feared to ally themselves with them until it became clear that they had a strong hold on the area.

²⁵ Jeffers to Goldsborough, 21 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 656-7.

ROWAN'S ATTACK ON WINTON

Concurrent with Jeffers' orders, Goldsborough authorized Rowan to embark on a joint expedition with Colonel Rush Hawkins and his Zouaves. Their goal was to destroy two railroad bridges of the Seaboard and Roanoke Railroads crossing the Blackwater and Kottoway rivers near the town of Winton, and to investigate reports of loyal Union men in the area.¹ Hawkins joined Rowan on the *Delaware*, and, with the *Commodore Perry*, *Barney*, *Hunchback*, *Lockwood*, *Louisiana*, *Morse*, and *Whitehead* close behind, they steamed up the Chowan River toward Winton.

Unbeknownst to them, however, the Confederate government, in the wake of the Roanoke Island disaster, had determined that Winton was a likely target for the Union forces, and had rushed to fortify the little town. Lieutenant Colonel William T. Williams' First Battalion of North Carolina Volunteers, together with several companies of militia and a four-gun battery under the command of Captain J. N. Nichols, was sent to prevent it from falling into enemy hands. As the Union flotilla was steaming up the river toward the town, Colonel Williams and his force hid on the high bluff separating Winton from the river, and bribed a mulatto woman named Martha Keen to go down and stand on the wharf and signal to the vessels. It was Williams' hope that the Union forces would

¹ U.S. Navy Department, *Official Record of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894-1922) [hereafter cited as *ORN*], Goldsborough to Welles, 20 February 1862, Series I, Volume 6, 635-6.

believe the town to be unoccupied, and be lured to the wharf and be trapped under the fire of Williams' force.²

The morning of the 19th, Rowan sent Murray in the *Lockwood* to reconnoiter the area around Plymouth, and, leaving the main body of the force at the mouth of the Roanoke River to await his return, he steamed up the river with the *Perry*, headed for Winton. They had believed the town was inhabited by Union men. At 4:00 PM the town was in sight, and the *Delaware* steamed toward the wharf, where Martha Keen was standing, waving a handkerchief at them. They were within 350 yards of the landing, and preparing to let go the anchor, when Hawkins, who was in the rigging acting as a lookout, saw the glint of sunlight on the barrels of the guns trained on the ship from the high bluff.³ He shouted a warning, but the enemy force had opened fire on them long before the pilot of the ship was able to alter the course. Hawkins scrambled down out of the rigging amidst the fire of the enemy, descending so quickly—and so ungracefully—that the Confederates reported that he had been hit and had fallen, and was thought to be dead.⁴ The ship was too close to be able to bring her guns to bear on the enemy, who were elevated too high over the river. The *Perry*, however, had been far enough behind the *Delaware* at the time of the attack that Flusser was able to fire shrapnel among the forces on the bluff. As soon as the *Delaware* was capable of doing so, fire was returned.

² John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 92.

³ U.S. War Department, *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies During the War of the Rebellion*, 70 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1881-1901) [hereafter cited as *ORA*], Rush C. Hawkins to John Parke, 21 February 1862, Series I, Volume 9, 195-6.

⁴ H. K. Burgwyn to H. T. Clark, Feb. 22, 1862, H.T. Clark Papers, Manuscript Division, North Carolina Department of Archives and History.

Rowan regrouped his forces and anchored about 7 miles below the town for the night, and prepared to return the following morning.

Rowan, inspecting *Delaware*, found “185 bullet holes in and around the ship, damage sustained from the enemy.”⁵ Luckily, however, no one was injured, since most of the men were below decks. In addition, though they had suffered damage from the enemy’s musketry, the artillery had overshoot them completely. Burnside elaborates in his report, noting that “Several of those on deck had ball-holes through their clothes. Captain Rowan, who was on deck, and Colonel Hawkins, in the rigging, made most miraculous escapes.”⁶

In Winton, Williams’ men celebrated what they thought had been a decisive victory; the following morning, when Rowan’s force returned, they were completely unprepared. When it was heard that the small naval force was steaming quickly up the river, Williams’ force beat a hasty retreat. The vessels in the lead opened fire on the shore to cover the landing of the troops, and Hawkins’ Zouaves leapt ashore. They met with no opposition, and in short order had possession of the bluff and the town behind it. Hawkins reported, “I then ordered that every building containing stores for the enemy and occupied by them as quarters should be fired, and placed guards in the others to see that they were not disturbed or destroyed.”⁷ He maintained that his reasons for this were twofold; one, “retaliation for trying to decoy us into a trap at the time of the firing into the Delaware,” and secondly because the buildings that he ordered destroyed had been

⁵ Abstract log of the U.S.S. *Delaware*, December 7, 1861, to March 7, 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 692-3.

⁶ A. Burnside to L. Thomas, 23 February 1862, in *ORA*, ser. I, vol. 9, 193-4.

⁷ Hawkins to Parke, 21 February 1862, in *ORA*, ser. I, vol. 9, 195-6.

used by a rebel force that “had been raised, supported, and used by the States in rebellion for the purpose of subverting the Constitution and the laws of the United States.”⁸ His injured pride, thanks to his embarrassingly clumsy descent from the rigging the day before, might have had something to do with it as well.

Burnside reported that the Blackwater River had been blocked by fallen trees, preventing the vessels from steaming further upriver, and so they were unable to complete the other object of the expedition.⁹ After the troops had embarked, Rowan took in tow a schooner found along the wharf, dispatched the *Perry* and the *Whitehead* to Elizabeth City, and returned to Croatan Sound. Rowan had attempted to destroy the locks on the Dismal Swamp Canal,¹⁰ but had been unable to do so; he reported to Flag Officer Goldsborough:

"In consequence of the failure to destroy the locks in the dismal Swamp Canal, and the report that the canal is being deepened for the purpose of bringing through some iron clad vessels, one of which is now completed, another nearly so, and a third is being built out of sight in deep creek, I deem it advisable to keep all the force I can off Elizabeth City."¹¹

General Burnside spent most of the month after the attack on Roanoke Island dealing with logistical issues of victory, which included the arrangement of the parole of upwards of 2,500 Confederate prisoners and dealing with runaway slaves. With the Federals in possession of the island, slaves in the state began fleeing to it in droves. There were so many “contrabands,” as they were frequently called, that Goldsborough

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ A. Burnside to L. Thomas, 23 February 1862, in *ORA*, ser. I, vol. 9, 193-4.

¹⁰ Private Journal of Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy, Microfilm 180, *Papers of Stephen C. Rowan, August 27, 1826-March 28, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) [hereafter cited as “Rowan Papers, M180”], vol. 4, 83-4.

¹¹ Ibid., vol. 4, 91.

had to issue an order to the vessels of the Navy that they had neither the room nor the resources to support any more of them, and that “no more of them are to be received on board any vessel of the Navy now in these waters.”¹² Burnside, much to the dismay of the slave owners, would not force any of the runaway slaves that made it to Roanoke Island to return to their former masters. Instead, he gave every able-bodied slave a new job—one with pay. They were offered the sum of \$8.00 a month and a full set of clothing in return for manual labor performed on the island.¹³ After he had restored some semblance of order to the island, he turned his eyes on New Bern.

¹² Goldsborough to Rowan, 16 February 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 6, 650.

¹³ David Stick, *The Outer Banks of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 161.

RIVERINE ACTION AND ROWAN'S CONTRIBUTIONS AT THE CONQUEST OF NEW BERN

New Bern was one of the primary targets of the Burnside Expedition; it lay on the southwest bank of the Neuse River, just under forty miles from its mouth in Pamlico Sound. The river leading up to the town was broad and deep, making it ideal for a combined Army/Navy attack. The Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad, which was the area's primary connection between the North Carolina coast and the interior of the state, passed through the town of Goldsborough (also spelled "Goldsboro"), where it intersected the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, a connecting lifeline for the Confederate forces in Virginia.

Though Goldsborough had intended on being present to head the Navy's side of the expedition, he was called away to Hampton Roads at the last minute as a result of the threat of the *Merrimac*. This left Rowan in command of the naval forces for the expedition. He chose as his flagship the *Philadelphia*, and had also with him the *Stars and Stripes*, the *Louisiana*, the *Hetzel*, the *Delaware*, the *Commodore Perry*, the *Valley City*, the *Underwriter*, the *Commodore Barney*, the *Hunchback*, the *Southfield*, the *Morse*, the *Henry Brinker*, and the *Lockwood*. These vessels met Burnside's force, consisting of three brigades of roughly 11,000 men, which had embarked from Roanoke Island, at Hatteras on March 12, and they sailed for the Neuse River.

The Army under Brigadier General Ambrose E. Burnside embarked on the 11th, boarding the transports in anticipation of leaving the following morning. They met Rowan's force near Hatteras Inlet at 7:30 the next morning, and set off for the Neuse River. Burnside requested that Rowan send one of the gunboats to guard the mouth of

the Pamlico River, owing to intelligence "that two steamers were in that river."¹

Rowan dispatched the *Lockwood* to remain there for the night. A small enemy steamer was sighted up the Neuse River, and Rowan sent the *Delaware* after it; the ship returned after the enemy vessel ran up under the guns of one of the batteries. A little after six that evening, within the sight of New Bern, the Union forces arrived at Slocum's Creek, some 16 miles from the town, the site Burnside had selected for the Army's landing. The Naval vessels anchored in three columns, and preparations were made for the landing.

At 8:30 AM, Rowan gave the order for the *Delaware* to begin shelling the area around Slocum's Creek, some 15 miles from New Bern, to clear the way for the landing of the troops. An hour later, the Army began to land, along with six naval boat howitzers under the command of Lieutenant H.S. McCook of the *Stars and Stripes*. Because the Confederate commander, Brigadier General Lawrence O'Brian Branch, had received false intelligence on the Union landing, the actual landing was unopposed.²

As soon as all of the Army was ashore, Rowan went upriver in the *Delaware* to investigate the battery at Fort Dixie, which opened fire. Rowan returned fire, as did the *Perry*. Rowan went aboard the *Southfield*, leaving the *Delaware* and the *Lockwood* "to amuse themselves with the battery till night,"³ and doubled back toward the landing site at the request of General Burnside. The two determined a system of signals to use so that

¹ U.S. Navy Department, *Official Record of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894-1922) [hereafter cited as *ORN*], Rowan to Goldsborough, 20 March 1862, Series I, Volume 7, 110-2.

² Fred M. Mallison, *The Civil War on the Outer Banks: A History of the Late Rebellion Along the Coast of North Carolina From Carteret to Currituck* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998), 91.

³ Rowan to Goldsborough (unofficial), 15 March 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 7, 117-8.

Burnside could notify Rowan of the troops' progress. As the Army progressed toward New Bern, the fleet shadowed them, shelling the road in advance. The enemy's batteries opened fire on the gunboats at around 4:15, as soon as they were in range. The Union vessels returned fire until sundown, when they anchored in a position that would allow them to cover the troops on shore.⁴

The men passed a wet and miserable night on shore. The continuous rain had made the ground muddy, hindering the progress of the men and especially the guns. Burnside states in his report that the naval battery under Lieutenant McCook and the two guns landed by Captains Bennett and Dayton did not reach the site where Burnside had ordered a halt for the night until three in the morning. He blamed the "shocking conditions of the roads"⁵ for the delay. Burnside later stated that the men responsible for the artillery could not be praised enough for the harrowing service they had performed for the force, "as these eight pieces constituted our entire artillery force during the engagement of the next day."⁶

Burnside had the men up and moving early the next morning. As soon as Rowan heard firing from inland, around 6:30, he ordered the vessels to open fire ahead of the troops' position. Owing to the fog, the signals between the two commanders were at times rendered useless. Throughout the battle, the fog would remain, at times "so dense

⁴ Rowan to Goldsborough, 16 March 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 7, 108-9.

⁵ U.S. War Department, *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies During the War of the Rebellion*, 70 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1881-1901) [hereafter cited as *ORA*], A. Burnside to L. Thomas, 16 March 1862, Series I, Volume 9, 197-9. Burnside noted that the roads were in such a poor state that the men were often wading in "knee-deep mud," and that it required "a whole regiment to drag the eight pieces which had been landed from the Navy and our own vessels."

⁶ A. Burnside to Edwin M. Stanton, 10 April 1862, in *ORA*, ser. I, vol. 9, 201-7.

that the position of the enemy could only be ascertained by the rattle of their musketry and the roar of artillery."⁷ As a result, the naval vessels sometimes had to guess where their Army force was located by the sounds of the battle. Rowan knew there was danger in continuing to shell the area; but rather than leaving them to fend for themselves, he kept up the fire as best as he could determine.

Burnside reported the Army's advance, writing that "after an engagement of four hours we succeeded in carrying a continuous line of field work of over a mile in length, protected on the river flank by a battery of thirteen heavy guns and on the opposite flank by a line of redoubts of over a half a mile in length for riflemen and field pieces, in the midst of swamps and dense forests, which line of works was defended by eight regiments of infantry, 500 cavalry, and three batteries of field artillery of six guns each."⁸ Burnside and his men were able to gain access to the rear of these batteries by "a most gallant charge" up the main road and railroad. Aiding the Union forces was the naval fleet, "pushing its way up the river, throwing their shots into the forts and in front of us."⁹

While the Army was slowly fighting its way toward New Bern, the Navy inched its way up the river. The *Delaware* and the *Southfield* advanced on Fort Dixie, and were soon joined by the heavier gunboats. When no response was given, Rowan sent a boat party ashore. They found it deserted, and wasted no time in raising the flag there. Rowan pressed on toward Fort Ellis, where exploded magazines enabled Rowan's men to take the Fort. In a letter to Goldsborough, Rowan joked that one of his officers "swears

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ A. Burnside to L. Thomas, 16 March 1862, in *ORA*, ser. I, vol. 9, 197-9.

⁹ Ibid.

his Stilton cheese did it."¹⁰ Rowan had the ships line up abreast and advance on Fort Thompson, and they opened fire on the Fort. Soon after, "an officer from General Burnside came down to the beach and informed me that our shells were falling to the left, and near our own troops."¹¹ Rowan quickly corrected the issue, continuing to fire on the fort as the vessels advanced to the first line of obstructions in the river.

The Confederates had placed barriers at two places along the river, the first consisting of rows of pointed pilings sunk at a 45 degree angle downstream and cut off just below the waterline, followed by a similar row of pilings that had been capped with iron points. This was followed by "a row of thirty torpedoes, containing about two hundred pounds of powder each, and fitted with metal fuzes connected to spring percussion locks with trigger-lines attached to the pointed piles."¹² When Fort Thompson ceased firing, Rowan gave the order for the other vessels to follow, advancing through the two barriers. The Army then raised the American flag on the fort. As they were approaching the torpedoes, Rowan's pilot said they had to stop or risk being blown up, to which Rowan replied that they must run some risk, and he hoped their machines would not go off. Ayres later wrote of the exchange, "If he had only said, 'Damn the torpedoes,' as Farragut did two years later, he would have immortalized himself."¹³ Three of the ships were slightly injured by the pilings during the advance, but none of the torpedoes exploded. The second barrier, which was about a mile above the first, consisted of a row

¹⁰ Rowan to Goldsborough (unofficial), 15 March 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 7, 117-8.

¹¹ Rowan to Goldsborough, 10 March 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 7, 110-2.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Stephen Cooper Ayres, "Sketch of the Life and Services of Vice Admiral Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy" (read before the Ohio Commandery of the Loyal Legion, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1910), 13.

of sunken vessels, "closely massed, amid cheval-de-frise, leaving a very narrow passage under the battery."¹⁴

The Union vessels pressed on past the batteries along the river, firing on them and sending landing parties on shore to raise the flag over them as they were deserted. As they approached the wharves of the city, Rowan opened fire from the *Delaware* on three steamboats, one of which had a schooner in tow, that were attempting to escape upriver. Two of the steamers were captured, along with the schooner, and the other was run aground and burned.¹⁵

At about noon, Rowan brought the *Delaware* in along the wharf, and told the inhabitants of the town that the Union meant them no harm. The retreating Confederates had set multiple fires in the town, but Rowan and other naval officers managed to convince the people there to help them extinguish the flames. A floating raft in the Trent River, stacked high with bales of cotton soaked in turpentine, was set on fire and pushed downstream, setting fire to the railroad bridge. Also destroyed was the draw of the country road bridge. Rowan correctly surmised that the Confederates were trying to slow the Union troops' advance. General Foster's brigade, under Burnside's orders, took "possession of the town by means of the naval vessels, which Commodore Rowan had kindly volunteered for the purpose."¹⁶ Rowan reported that he sent vessels at about 4:00 PM to carry the brigade of General Foster to the town so that the Army could occupy it.¹⁷

¹⁴ Rowan to Goldsborough, 10 March 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 7, 110-2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ A. Burnside to L. Thomas, 16 March 1862, in *ORA*, ser. I, vol. 9, 197-9.

¹⁷ Private Journal of Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy, Microfilm 180, *Papers of Stephen C. Rowan, August 27, 1826-March 28, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical

Rowan ordered the *Louisiana* and the *Barney* to secure any munitions and supplies that might be found, and the Army seized the town's printing press.

Rowan reported on the forts that had been captured, both by the Army and the Navy, of which there were nine, six of which were located along the Neuse River and the approach to New Bern. Rowan described these six forts as "well constructed earthworks... mounting in all thirty-two guns, ranging from 32-pounders to 80-pounders rifled, all in barbette, with the exception of one casemated fort mounting two guns."¹⁸

Burnside, in his report, gave a list of the results of the battle: "The capture of nine forts, with forty-one heavy guns; two miles of entrenchments, with nineteen field pieces; six 32-pounders not in position; over 300 prisoners; over 1,000 stand of small-arms; tents and barracks for 10,000 troops; a large amount of ammunition and army supplies; an immense amount of naval stores, for which I refer you to Commodore Rowan's report; the second commercial city in the State of North Carolina; the entire command of the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds; the capture of Beaufort, Carolina, and Morehead Cities, and the complete investment of Fort Macon, which we hope soon to reduce."¹⁹

General Burnside's generous praise of Rowan and the Navy was appropriate. He correctly noted that Commodore Rowan and his command had provided "timely" assistance and "great service in the accomplishment of our undertaking."²⁰ In a later report, he wrote of the telling effect that the combined Army/Navy attack had on the Confederates. He stated that the combined movement of the Union Army and Navy had forced the enemy to flee in the "greatest confusion."²¹ He believed that the two arms of the service had worked together effectively and efficiently since the capture of Hatteras

Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) [hereafter cited as "Rowan Papers, M180"], vol. 4, 51.

¹⁸ Rowan to Goldsborough, 10 March 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 7, 110-2.

¹⁹ A. Burnside to E. Stanton, 10 April 1862, in *ORA*, ser. I, vol. 9, 201-7.

²⁰ A. Burnside to L. Thomas, 16 March 1862, in *ORA*, ser. I, vol. 9, 197-9.

²¹ A. Burnside to E. Stanton, 10 April 1862, in *ORA*, ser. I, vol. 9, 201-7.

Inlet. Burnside praised the brave officers and sailors of Rowan's command, and expressed the firm conviction that they were "bound to us by the strongest ties of friendship and companionship in arms."²²

Rowan continued to serve on the flotilla in the Sounds, and enjoyed a congenial relationship with the army officers, especially General Burnside. In a letter to Goldsborough, relaying the goings-on of the area, he wrote, "I travel charmingly in harness with the generals, particularly the chief, who is a trump."²³ He also stated that Burnside offered to put his vessels under Rowan's command.²⁴ Burnside expressed his desire to keep the Navy flotilla close at hand, and, after two vessels were transferred from Rowan's command, Burnside wrote a letter to Seward, the Secretary of War, in which he asked him to "remind" Welles, the Secretary of the Navy, how vital Rowan's force was to maintaining control over the area. Burnside suggested that the naval force under Commodore Rowan be "strengthened rather than weakened."²⁵ This desire, on the part of both Rowan and Burnside, to keep the naval force there well equipped, was fueled by the rumors that three Confederate ironclads were near completion, and might at any moment appear in the Sounds.

Rowan's contributions were acknowledged on July 11, 1862, when the Commander received the thanks of Congress, at the request of President Lincoln himself, "for distinguished services in the waters of North Carolina and particularly in the capture

²² Ibid.

²³ Rowan to Goldsborough, 29 March 1862, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 7, 177-9.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ A. Burnside to E. Stanton, 30 May 1862, in *ORA*, ser. I, vol. 9, 394-5.

of New Berne, being in chief command of the naval forces.”²⁶ This same month, Rowan was detached from the command of the flotilla in the Sounds and ordered to command the *Powhatan*, and on the 16th he was commissioned as a Captain.²⁷ Whereas Rowan’s promotion was well-deserved, other officers’ promotions were questioned. For instance, John A. Dahlgren was appointed commander of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron on July 6, 1863 at the request of Lincoln. He was promoted to rear admiral, and relieved Samuel F. Du Pont as commander; many officers were rankled by his quick and easy promotion. Du Pont himself had previously written to Fox expressing his bitter feelings about Dahlgren:

He chose one line in the walk of his profession while Foote and I chose another; he was licking cream while we were eating dirt and living on the *pay* of our *rank*. Now he wants all the honors belonging to the other but without having encountered its joltings.²⁸

When he heard that Du Pont was to be relieved, the first commanding officer of the *New Ironsides*, Thomas Turner, who had previously been Dahlgren’s superior, also asked to be relieved. A testimony to Rowan’s Commanding skills can be seen in his election to command the *New Ironsides*. Welles recognized that Rowan was an officer with a level head who would not likewise resent the promotion of an officer whom many felt did not deserve it. Thus, Welles detached Rowan from the *Roanoke* and sent him to command the *New Ironsides*.

²⁶ Abraham Lincoln, *Abraham Lincoln: Complete Works, Comprising His Speeches, Letters, State Papers, and Miscellaneous Writings*, edited by John G. Nicolay and John Hay (New York: The Century Co., 1907), 203.

²⁷ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 289.

²⁸ Gustavus Vasa Fox, *Confidential Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox* (Hallendale, FL: New World Book Manufacturing Co., 1972 (reprint—1920)), 160.

ROWAN AND THE UNION BLOCKADE: CHARELSTON

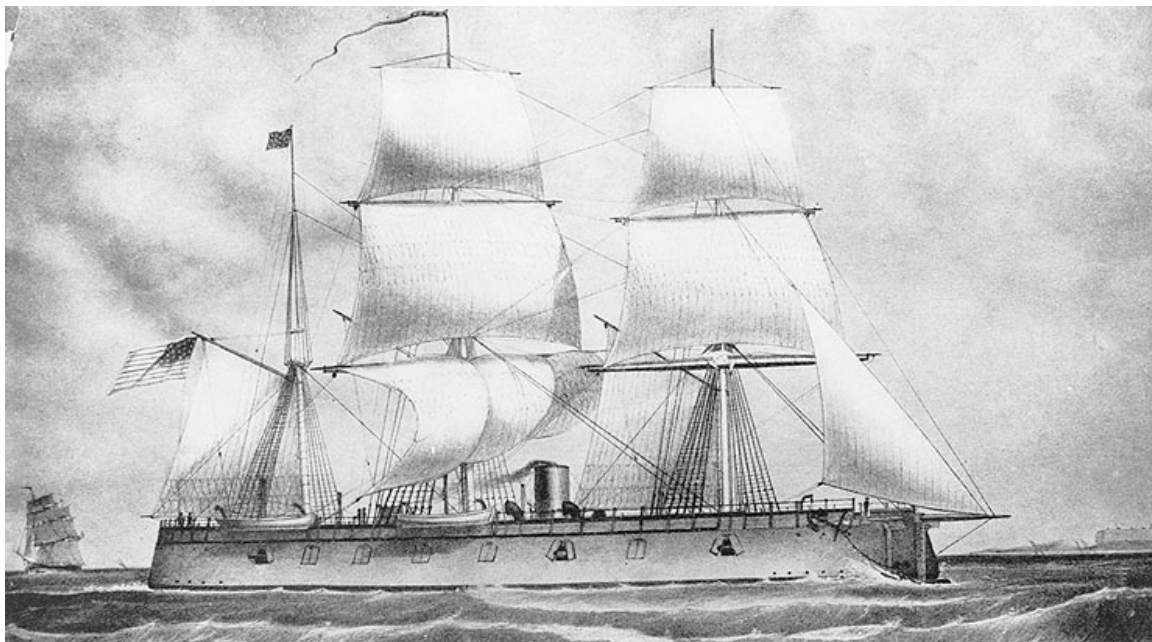


Fig. 4: *USS New Ironsides* under sail.

The *New Ironsides* had been one of the Union's three original ironclad vessels; of the three of them, she was "the least revolutionary," but "in almost every respect, by far the most successful."¹ This was the only ironclad of a broadsides design during the war, mounting a battery of two 150-pounder muzzle-loading rifles and fourteen XI-inch smoothbore Dahlgren guns. She was 230 feet long, with a beam of 56 feet and a draft of 15 feet, 8 inches.² Her bulky hull made her slow, but her armor more than made up for it. A belt of iron four and a half inches thick below her waterline encased her entirely, and

¹ Spencer C. Tucker, *Blue and Gray Navies: The Civil War Afloat* (Annapolis: US Naval Institute Press, 2006), 37.

² William H. Roberts, *USS New Ironsides in the Civil War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 11.

another above it spanned 170 feet of her length. While the armor of the *Monitor* was laminated, that of the *New Ironsides* was solid plate, which proved much more resilient. She also proved to be much better suited to blockade duty at sea due to her height above the waterline; monitors of early design had only one or two feet of freeboard, and even the ones that had been built with coastal sea service in mind had a mere “2 feet, 7 inches. The *New Ironsides* had a full 13 feet of freeboard, putting the bores of her guns 9-10 feet above water, where there was no fear of interference by the sea.”³

It was the manner in which her guns were mounted, in the manner of the old broadside ships, that made the *New Ironsides* such a danger to the Confederate forts in Charleston: her “quick-firing broadsides of 11-inch shell guns” were more effective than the slower discharges of the other ironclad turret vessels. With the guns arranged in such a manner, Rowan’s vessel “was more troublesome to Fort Wagner than all the monitors

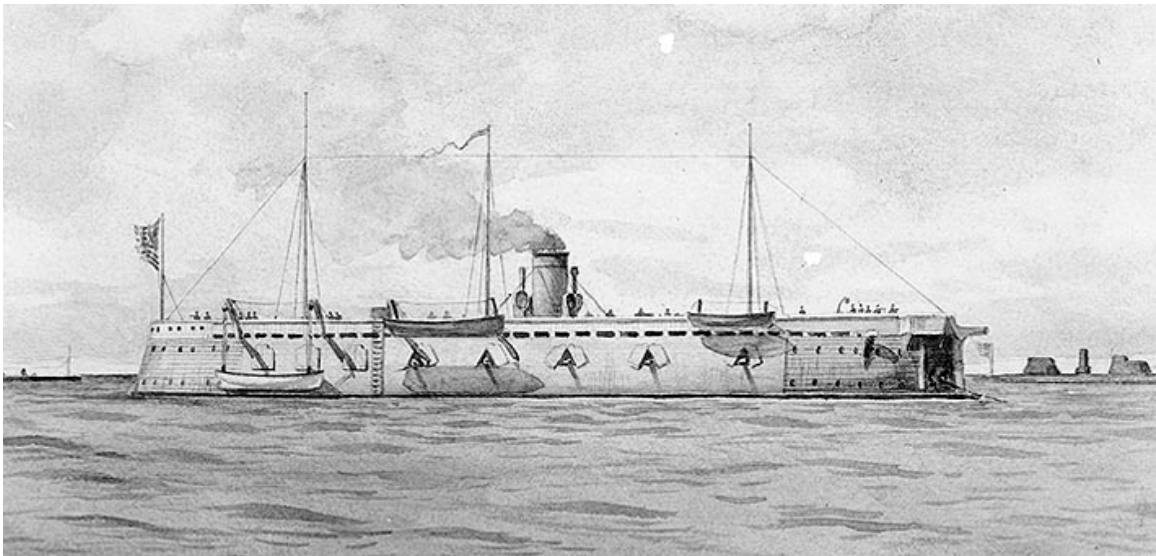


Fig. 5: *USS New Ironsides*, on blockade, c. 7 April, 1863.

³ Tucker, 38.

combined.”⁴ Hence, Rowan served his time on the *New Ironsides* blockading Charleston. The harbor there was naturally a defensible position and was protected by a number of forts and batteries on the mainland lining both sides of the channel and on Morris Island. In conjunction with the Army’s second attempt on Fort Wagner on Morris Island, the Navy began a bombardment of the island which continued until September 8th. During these fifty-two days, Rowan was engaged with the *New Ironsides* for twenty-five of them. During the course of the action, he directly engaged Fort Wagner fourteen times, Fort Sumter four times, Fort Gregg five times, and Fort Moultrie two times. Rowan kept careful record of the ship’s firing throughout the bombardment, and in his report he stated that he had fired 4,439 shots, ranging in distances from 1200 yards (as close as her draft would allow) to 2500 yards. He also kept careful record of the number of times the ship was hit and the damage done; she was struck 164 times, “mostly by solid 10 in shot fired with very heavy charges,”⁵ and though she did suffer some damage, due to the strength of her armor it was not enough to force her out of action for repairs.

Admiral David Porter praised Rowan and his command of the *New Ironsides*. He, too, noted that there “was no vessel the enemy so heartily dreaded as the *Ironsides*. Her

⁴ John Thomas Scharf, *History of the Confederate States Navy* (New York: Rogers & Sherwood, 1887), 695.

⁵ Private Journal of Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy, Microfilm 180, *Papers of Stephen C. Rowan, August 27, 1826-March 28, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) [hereafter cited as “Rowan Papers, M180”], vol. 4, 292.

well drilled crew and expert gunners made her anything but welcome when she brought her broadsides to bear upon any of the forts.”⁶

Perhaps the most notable engagement Rowan participated in was the last, on September 8th. During the course of the battle, the *Weehawken* grounded between Sumter and Cummings Point and was helplessly exposed to the fire of Fort Moultrie. Rowan steamed the *New Ironsides* between the fort and its target, completely covering the *Weehawken*. He anchored with his port broadside bearing on the fort, and over the next two hours and fifty-five minutes, Rowan fired 483 at the various forts and batteries. In his report to Dahlgren, he stated:

“I soon discovered that we suffered severely from their other batteries of X-inch guns, between Moultrie and Beauregard, when I directed two guns to open on each of them. One of the heaviest guns in these works was dismounted and the fire of the others sensibly slackened. I then directed one gun to continue rapid fire on each of these forts and directed the remaining five to open on Moultrie. The fire of all the forts slackened down to an occasional gun, when I directed a slow fire to be kept up to economize shell. The moment the enemy discovered this, he jumped from behind his sand bags and opened fire rapidly. I renewed our rapid fire and silenced him again.”⁷

Rowan did not withdraw until he had a mere thirty shells left, and he continued firing these on Fort Moultrie as he weighed anchor. The *Weehawken* was off soon after. She needed repairs, but was back on blockade duty by October. The carpenter’s report stated that “Seventy hits can be counted, but the woodwork on the spar deck is so much

⁶ Stephen Cooper Ayres, “Sketch of the Life and Services of Vice Admiral Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy” (read before the Ohio Commandery of the Loyal Legion, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1910), 14-5.

⁷ U.S. Navy Department, *Official Record of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894-1922) [hereafter cited as *ORN*] Rowan to Dahlgren, 10 September 1863, Series I, Volume 14, 553-4.

cut up that we were probably struck near a hundred times.”⁸ There were a few injuries, but no one was killed. Likewise, Commander Edmund R. Colhoun, commander of the *Weehawken*, reported three injuries, but no deaths.⁹ Commander Stevens, in his report to Welles, referred to the incident as “the most formidable and severe action which has occurred between ironclads and land batteries.”¹⁰ Welles commended Rowan and his crew for their defense of the ship, and wrote, “it was gratifying to them [all present] to observe, and the Department is equally gratified to learn of, the gallant manner in which the *Weehawken* was defended.”¹¹

The Confederates recognized the danger that the *New Ironsides* posed, and frequently she was the main target of their fire during engagements. Several attempts were made on the vessel, none of which succeeded. General Beauregard himself advocated a torpedo attack on her, firmly of the belief that the loss of the *New Ironsides* would have a demoralizing effect on the Union fleet.¹² During Rowan’s time as her commander, two separate attempts were made by the Confederates to blow her up using vessels equipped with torpedoes. The first occurred in August, during the middle of the bombardment of Charleston, on the night of August 20 at around 10:00 PM. Ensign Benjamin H. Porter sighted a low, quick-moving craft coming toward the *New Ironsides*, and hailed it. The vessel was a torpedo craft called the *Torch*, and it was captained by James Carlin, who called out claiming that the vessel was the U.S.S. *Live Yankee*. Carlin

⁸ T.H. Bishop to Rowan, 9 September 1863, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 14, 555-6.

⁹ Edmund R. Colhoun to Dahlgren, including the report of the surgeon, 9 September 1863, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 14, 550-1.

¹⁰ T.H. Stevens to Welles, 28 September 1865, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 14, 633.

¹¹ Welles to Colhoun, 17 September 1863, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 14, 552.

¹² P.G.T. Beauregard to J.R. Tucker, 18 July 1863, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 14, 728.

had ordered the engines to be turned off when he believed the vessel's course would take them directly by the *New Ironsides*, but they would not start again. Carlin misjudged the vessel's course, and they passed harmlessly by. He had intended to attempt another pass if the first attempt to hit the vessel with a spar torpedo failed, but after the trouble with the engines, he decided against it.¹³

The second attempt was a little more advanced; the C.S.S. *David* was built specifically for torpedo attacks. Her single spar torpedo packed roughly 100 pounds of gunpowder.¹⁴ Her commanding officer, Lieutenant William T. Glassell, approached the *New Ironsides* on the night of October 5, 1863, with the intention of disabling the vessel with the torpedo. The sentinels stationed on the deck spotted a small, low object in the water, approaching the ship. Acting Ensign Charles W. Howard, officer of the deck, called out, but he received no answer. He ordered the sentinels to fire on the object, and directly after he gave the order, he was shot by one of the men on the *David*. The sentinels fired on the vessel, "and immediately the ship received a very severe blow from the explosion, throwing a column of water upon the spar deck and into the engine room."¹⁵

The sentinels continued to fire on the craft, and Rowan dispatched two cutters to look for it. The plume of water thrown up by the explosion, however, also hit the Confederate vessel, and their engine fires were put out. Glassell and the other three men on board were compelled to abandon it and swim for shore. Rowan remarked in his report that "Glassell hailed one of our coal schooners as he drifted past, and was rescued

¹³ J. Carlin to Beauregard, 33 August 1863, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 14, 498-9.

¹⁴ Roberts, 80.

¹⁵ Rowan to Dahlgren, 6 October 1863, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 15, 12-3.

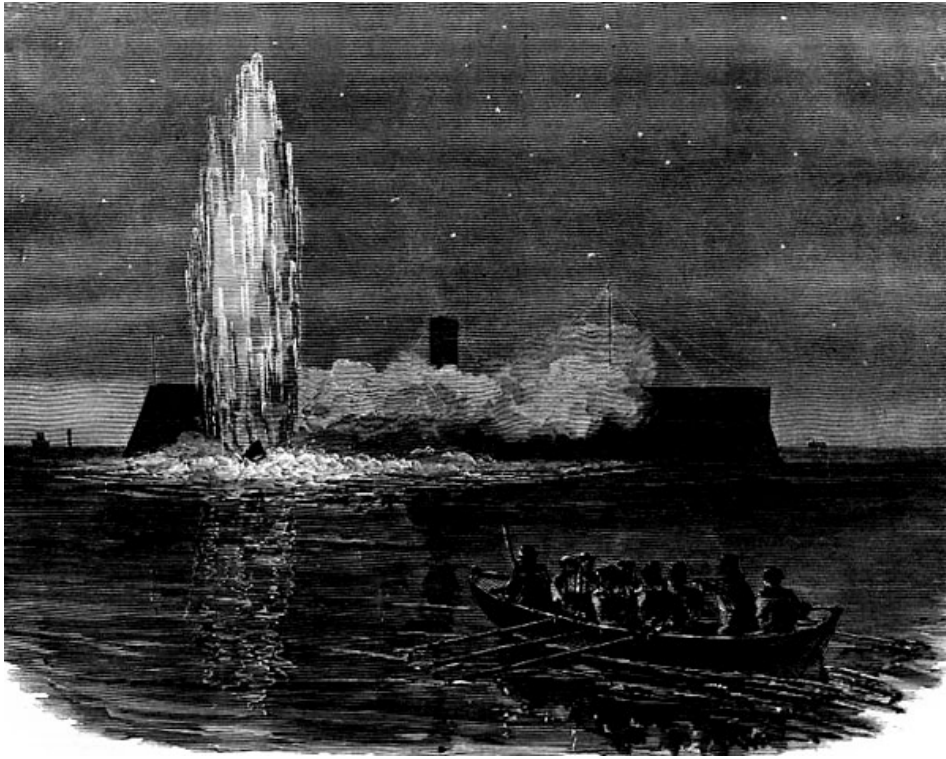


Fig. 6: *CSS David* attack on the *New Ironsides*.

from a grave he designed for the crew of this ship.”¹⁶ Glassell and another man from the vessel were captured, and, having been made prisoners on the *New Ironsides*, revealed to Rowan that the *David* was a torpedo steamer roughly fifty feet long and five feet in diameter. The vessel looked small because the only part of it visible was “the coamings of her hatch, which were only 2 feet above the waters edge and about 10 feet in length.”¹⁷

There was a bit of concern that the ship might be sinking, but an initial investigation of the damage revealed that the ship had not been harmed much. A better look in the following days, however, revealed it to worse than originally suspected. The

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

carpenter's report turned up a long list of repairs that needed to be made,¹⁸ but none that were immediately necessary. Dahlgren was reluctant to let the ship go off blockade to sail north for repairs, and so the *new Ironsides* remained.

Of all the services performed by Rowan during the time he served in the Navy, serving in the *New Ironsides* on the blockade of Charleston was the most trying, but also one of the most praised. Due to the *New Ironsides*' effectiveness on the blockade and her coppered bottom, she served continually throughout Rowan's entire service aboard her. While the other vessels on the blockade were cycled through Port Royal so their crews could go ashore for exercise and relaxation, the *New Ironsides*, "was the only vessel never permitted the recreation and refreshment of leaving behind for a few days the wearing and unceasing strain of the blockade."¹⁹ An indication of Rowan's concern for his men can be seen in his request to Dahlgren that the pay of the petty officers of the ship be increased to the same amount as the pay of the other monitors.²⁰ He wrote that "the berth deck is dark and too hot to be occupied; the thermometer running from 90 to 103 during warm weather."²¹ Conditions were cramped and uncomfortable, especially due to certain measures that had to be taken in light of the danger posed by the *David* vessels.

To illustrate the poor conditions, Rowan wrote that the men slept on the deck at their guns. He reported that hammocks could not be used because the gun deck was too

¹⁸ Rowan to Dahlgren, including the report of the carpenter, Bishop, 28 November 1863, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 15, 17-8.

¹⁹ Roberts, 90.

²⁰ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 151-2, vol. 4, 159; also in Rowan to Dehlgren, 3 October 1863, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 15, 25-6.

²¹ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 152.

low and “too much lumbered by the gun slides.”²² Rowan, who made two requests, was denied; “If the increased allowance be extended to her crew,” Welles wrote, “there is no good reason why it should not be extended to all others.”²³

Rowan was the second highest ranking officer in the Squadron, and so whenever Dahlgren was away, he was the Commander of the naval forces in Charleston. On February 5, 1864, Dahlgren notified Rowan that he would be away and gave him instructions for commanding the blockade while he was away.²⁴ While he was gone, on February 19, Lincoln nominated Rowan to be made a Commodore on the active list, dating back to the 7th (his first whole day in charge of the squadron).²⁵ Dahlgren returned on May 2, and resumed command of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron. After relaying all pertinent information and papers to the Rear Admiral, on May 3, 1864, Rowan wrote to Welles and asked to be relieved:

“I respectfully request that I may be relieved from my command with orders to go North for the purpose of recruiting my health which is breaking down from a long confinement of 10 months to this ship without opportunities of visiting the shore for necessary exercise.”²⁶

It was not until June that Rowan was relieved; on the 8th of that month he was ordered to take the *New Ironsides* to the Philadelphia Navy Yard, where he was to report to Commodore Stribling.²⁷

²² Ibid., vol. 4, 159.

²³ Welles to Dahlgren, 16 October 1863, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 15, 46-7.

²⁴ Dahlgren to Rowan, 5 February 1864, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 15, 272-3.

²⁵ Ayres, 16.

²⁶ Rowan Papers, M180, vol. 4, 184; also in Rowan to Welles, 3 May 1864, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 15, 418.

²⁷ Dahlgren to Rowan, 8 June 1864, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 15, 512.

On September 1, 1864, the naval force in the Sounds of North Carolina was made a command separate from the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, and Rowan was appointed to command it.²⁸ Rowan wrote to Welles and thanked him for the honor of being considered fit for the position, but respectfully asked to have the orders revoked. Rowan had suffered three and a half years in constant wartime command on the water, and was still recovering health-wise from eleven months confined on the *New Ironsides*. Welles responded on the 22nd of September, revoking the orders and telling Rowan to consider himself as waiting orders.²⁹ This ended Rowan's active service during the war.

The Navy played an invaluable role during the Civil War. Though its worth has been contested, some historians have called the Union blockade "the great fact of the war."³⁰ Historian Robert A. Doughty wrote that, according to one estimate, "84 percent of the runners that attempted the port of Wilmington made it through (1,735 out of 2,054), with a similar ratio prevailing along the rest of the Confederate coastline."³¹ Critics of the blockade have pointed to these numbers to prove its ineffectiveness. A better estimation of its value can be made, however, if one takes into consideration the comparison of sea trade during the war and what it had been prior to the blockade. Before the war began, the number of vessels carrying goods in and out of Southern ports was averaging around 5,000 a year; during the war it was closer to 1,600. The blockade

²⁸ Welles to Rowan, 1 September 1864, in *ORN*, ser. I, vol. 10, 415.

²⁹ Welles to Rowan, 22 September 1864, in *ORN* ser. I, vol. 10, 474.

³⁰ Charles Boynton, *The History of the Navy During the Rebellion: Volume One* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1868), 7.

³¹ Robert A. Doughty and Ira D. Gruber, *American Military History and the Evolution of Warfare in the Western World* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1996), 216.

runners also had to be small and light enough to evade the Union vessels, and so they were undoubtedly carrying less than the merchant vessels of previous years. With these particulars taken into consideration, the true effect of the blockade becomes more apparent.

Upholding the blockade was certainly not the Navy's only role in the Civil War, however, and it was arguably not even the most important. The contribution that the blockade made to Union victory is very difficult to gauge; it is much easier to measure the contribution the Navy made in its role regarding the support of the Union land forces. While there was naturally very little interaction between the army and the bluewater navy, "the army and the brownwater navy worked hand-in-glove throughout the war."³² Joint Army/Navy operations were frequent, with the Navy primarily landing troops and covering the Army's landings and advances. Union control of navigable waterways by riverine forces also facilitated the transportation of troops and supplies, and impeded similar efforts by the Confederates. In a letter to James C. Conkling, Abraham Lincoln wrote of the Navy, "At all the watery margins they have been present. Not only on the deep blue sea, the broad bay, the rapid river, but also up the narrow muddy bayou, and wherever the ground was a little damp, they have made their tracks."³³

For the navy, the Civil War marked a number of important technological changes, one of the most notable without a doubt being the introduction of ironclad vessels. At the beginning of the war, the Navy had no armored vessels of any kind; throughout the

³² Ibid., 217.

³³ Abraham Lincoln to James C. Conkling, 26 August 1863, as cited in Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 6: 409-10.

course of the conflict, the Confederacy built twenty-one ironclad vessels, most of which were built much like the CSS *Virginia*, and the Union built fifty-eight, most patterned after the USS *Monitor* (the most notable exception being the *New Ironsides*). Many more had been planned for, but were not completed.³⁴ The ironclad vessels, even the smaller ones, were superior to older wooden ships in many ways, and, at least when it came to coastal and riverine warfare, rendered them obsolete. Though they were not designed for travel on the open ocean, any one of them could reduce a much larger wooden vessel to kindling in a short amount of time. In a few short years, armored vessels had become the norm.

At the outbreak of the war, the Union Navy had forty-two vessels in commission, with 1,300 officers and 7,500 seamen to crew them. Little more than four years later, the Union Navy boasted 671 ships (58 of them ironclad), 6,700 officers, and 51,500 seamen. The Navy had made incredible advancements in technology and engineering; they had gone from being a motley mess of mismatched vessels to one of the most powerful naval forces in the world. Rowan played an important role in this process.

³⁴ Doughty, 219.

ROWAN'S COMMAND OF THE ASIATIC SQUADRON

Soon after the end of the Civil War, on July 26, 1866, Rowan was promoted, by selection, to the rank of Rear Admiral.¹ After a little over a year serving as the Commander of the Norfolk Navy Yard and Station, in September of 1867 he was ordered to command the Asiatic Squadron. He had been notified over the summer that he should hold himself in readiness for the position, and during the interim had written to Welles, requesting that Captain Daniel Ammen be given the command of his flagship.² Welles granted the request, and on September 10th, 1867, Rowan reported to ready his ship, the *Piscataqua*, for service. The ship left the Navy Yard November 5th, headed for the coast of Japan, where Rowan spent most of the next three years.

They stop in Hong Kong on the way, and Rowan paid a visit to Richard Graves MacDonnell, the British Governor. "I dined with him, and found him rather pompous, but a good fellow, and Lady MacDonnell is charming. She would redeem twenty faults in her better half."³ Rowan wrote that the colony of Hong Kong, which was supposed to be self-sustaining, in theory, was "embarrassed financially." There was tension between the Governor and the Chinese population of city, as a result of MacDonnell's method of attempting to solve the problem: "the governor is working out of debt by means of a large

¹ Stephen Cooper Ayres, "Sketch of the Life and Services of Vice Admiral Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy" (read before the Ohio Commandery of the Loyal Legion, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1910), 16.

² Private Journal of Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy, Microfilm 180, *Papers of Stephen C. Rowan, August 27, 1826-March 28, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) [hereafter cited as "Rowan Papers, M180"], vol. 4, 242.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 200.

revenue derived from gambling licenses.”⁴ The Chinese government was working to put a stop to it.

The *Piscataqua* arrived at Nagasaki in June of 1868. Rowan was fascinated by the history of Decima (or Dejima, as the Japanese called it), a small artificial island in the bay. It was built by the Japanese during the Edo period to serve as the single place of direct trade between the nation and the rest of the world, though the Dutch had a monopoly on their trade for many years. “I took some pains to visit the island of Decima where the Dutch were permitted to live and trade with Japan, sending two ships a year for that purpose.”⁵ The island was small; Rowan estimated it to be one hundred yards long and fifty feet wide, and covered with small dwellings and warehouses, where, Rowan was told, the Dutch trade agents “remained year after year and day after day, shut up on an Island not larger than a good sized kitchen garden without the privilege of stepping a cross the bridge on to main land.”⁶ The Dutch traders were not allowed off of the island, and the bridge that linked the little island to the mainland was guarded at all times.

Rowan admired much about the nation of Japan, its people and culture. He was struck by the honesty of every Japanese citizen, the respect they showed for all other people, and the tireless manner in which they devoted themselves to their work. He expressed profound regret over the fact that so many Western nations sought to “improve” their way of life. Rowan observed the lack of poverty and filth in Japan. He found the Japanese to be “industrious good natured people.” He described their lives as “simple and natural,” and believed their manners were “distinguished for politeness, and

⁴ Ibid., vol. 3, 201.

⁵ Ibid., vol. 3, 205.

⁶ Ibid., vol. 3, 204.

grace, and kindness.” Rowan was impressed with the literacy of the Japanese, saying that “Every one (as a rule) can read, and most can write.” Rowan noted, “They have a religion which they value... The poorest laborer is always spoken to civilly, and gives a civil answer. These are the half civilized Asiatic we propose to convert to white ways, and persuade to follow our example!! Perhaps if we knew more we should be more tolerant.”⁷

With an honesty somewhat unusual for Americans at the time, Rowan observed that every nation is prone to conceit, and all seek to glorify themselves even at the expense of other nations. “England is beyond all others, and America not far behind,”⁸ he wrote, though he admitted that Japan was no exception. The rate of crime was low, but it existed, though Rowan observed that it might have something to do with the strict laws regarding punishment: “What ever the crime the punishment is retaliatory. A murderer is killed, an incendiary is burned, there is no mercy.”⁹

Rowan referred to women as “the most intricate of all subjects,” and the women of Japan were perplexing, indeed. Rowan wrote that it was permitted for parents to sell their daughters into prostitution for a predetermined amount of time, “and it is not disgraceful.” A certain part of the city was set aside for them, and they could be visited by their friends and family, “and it is not uncommon for men to seek wives from these houses.” Despite this, Rowan observed, the condition of women in Japan was superior to that of other Asian countries, and even to that of many women in America and European nations. “She is subject to no seclusion, she shares the amusements of her husband. She

⁷ Ibid., vol. 3, 214.

⁸ Ibid., vol. 3, 212.

⁹ Ibid., vol. 3, 218.

is almost sure of marriage. Infidelity in the married state is rare.”¹⁰

Rowan wrote less about China, but he was no less intrigued by it. He noted that, contrary to “Empires” in the Western world, the Chinese emperor was “absolute but not despotic.” Rowan was taught that the emperor delegated his powers “to ministers, who in turn delegate to subordinates, descending down through who are as absolute in their sphere, as any other. This power being infinitely divisible is not dangerous, and public opinion is always ready to check any abuses on the part of the Emperor.”¹¹

Rowan described the main religion of the Chinese, Buddhism, and he contrasted the story he was told, involving a virgin birth and a man who was regarded as divine, with Christianity. Despite the similarities Rowan noted that the Christian missionaries, in 1723, had been declared by the Emperor to be “disturbers of the public peace,”¹² and had been banished. Another aspect of Chinese life, which Rowan found appalling, was the practice of foot-binding. He stated “Small feet became the fashion in remote antiquity, and no Chinese woman can hope to marry unless she has been tortured in infancy by compressing to keep her feet nearly the size they were at her birth.”¹³

Rowan and his crew on the *Piscataqua* returned to New York in November, 1870. In his absence, Rowan had been promoted to Vice Admiral by the President of the United States, Ulysses S. Grant, with the approval of the Secretary of the Navy, George M. Robeson. Robley Dunglison Evans, a sailor who served under Rowan, wrote of his service in the Navy, and of his time spent on the Asiatic Squadron. He wrote that when

¹⁰ Ibid., vol. 3, 220-1.

¹¹ Ibid., vol. 3, 227.

¹² Ibid., vol. 3, 231.

¹³ Ibid., vol. 3, 229.

they returned to New York, on their approach to the Navy Yard, they met the

Guerriere on its way out.

“She saluted us with seventeen guns, which was the first intimation we had that Admiral Rowan had been made vice-admiral. Our officers and crew were wild with delight, and cheered until the admiral showed himself on deck. It was a splendid reward for his magnificent conduct during the civil war, and made solely on his merits. At the time it was done he was at sea, out of reach of anything like political influence, and not even where he could be communicated with. Once in our history, anyhow, the man who deserved it was made vice-admiral.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Robley Dunglison Evans, *A Sailor's Log: Recollections of Forty Years of Naval Life* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1908), 153.

ROWAN'S CONTINUED SERVICE

The command of the Asiatic Squadron was Rowan's last service performed at sea, but he continued to serve in the Navy for another eighteen years. He served in command of the New York Navy Yard from 1872 until 1876, and as Port Admiral until 1877. He was appointed to several boards, including one created to "examine cases of officers who may deem themselves to have been unjustly passed over"¹ for promotions, and one to examine the system of education of Midshipmen at Annapolis.

On January 14, 1871, Rowan wrote to the President, forwarding the application of his son Hamilton for an appointment to the Military Academy at West Point;² President Grant issued the appointment. The following May, Rowan was appointed to the Board of Visitors to the Military Academy by the Secretary of War, William W. Belknap. Rowan of course accepted the position.

In 1877, he was appointed the President of the Examining and Retiring Boards at Washington. On September 22, 1881, Rowan was ordered to command the Naval Guard that was detached to accompany the remains of President James A. Garfield to Cleveland, Ohio. The following summer, he was ordered to the Naval Observatory to serve as Superintendent, and in 1883 he received an appointment for duty as Chairman of the Lighthouse Board, on which he served until his retirement six years later.

He retired voluntarily in 1889, and he passed away the following year on March

¹ Private Journal of Stephen C. Rowan, U.S. Navy, Microfilm 180, *Papers of Stephen C. Rowan, August 27, 1826-March 28, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) [hereafter cited as "Rowan Papers, M180"], vol. 4, 289.

² *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 246.

31, 1890, at the age of 82, having served faithfully in the Navy for 64 of those years.

He was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Georgetown, D.C., next to his wife.

Rowan had progressed through the ranks of the Navy on his own skill and merit, and had been well liked by other officers and the men that served under him. He had an easy nature and a good sense of humor—one that allowed the sailors serving under him to affectionately call him “Paddy Rowan.” Enough letters praising him during the Civil War made it home to sisters and mothers and wives that in 1864, when the Sanitary Commission of New York awarded a sword to the most popular Naval Officer, Rowan was selected as the recipient.

Admiral T. H. Stevens, regarding Rowan and his services to his country, wrote, “In reviewing this brilliant series of successes and victories, of paramount value... we cannot fail to recognize the fine skill, untiring energy, cool and tempered judgment, quick perception and dash of Rowan, which fully establish his claims to rank with the leading naval commanders of the day. No grass grew under his keel; no victory was gained until all its fruits were fully garnered. Like the waves of the sea, success followed success, and while there was work to be done he rested not, nor allowed others to rest. This was war never better illustrated.”³

Rowan had served his adopted country through turbulent periods of expansion (the Second Seminole War, the Mexican War), overseas explorations, and civil conflict (the Civil War). When he retired in 1889, his nation—and the US Navy—were on the verge of another round of expansion and conflict (Spanish-American War, World War I).

³ T.H. Stevens, *A Naval Encyclopaedia: Comprising a Dictionary of Nautical Words and Phrases; Biographical Notices, and Records of Naval Officers* (Philadelphia: L.R. Hamersly & Co., 1881), 705.

CONCLUSION

When Rowan joined the Navy at the age of eighteen, he could not have fathomed the extent to which it would shape his future. On one of his very first voyages, Rowan circumnavigated the globe; in an era when travel was arduous and dangerous, he had seen more in five years than most people today will see in a lifetime. During the Second Seminole War, Rowan had experienced riverine warfare for the first time, and had participated in and contributed to the development of techniques that would be utilized as far into the future as the Vietnam War. Most of all, perhaps, these formative years served best to prepare Rowan for a greater role in larger conflicts in his future.

During the Mexican War, Rowan had started out as the executive officer of the *Cyane*. This role required great responsibility on his part, and through it he earned the respect of his peers and many of his superiors. Later in the war, he was entrusted with several authoritative positions, afloat and ashore. Rowan and other navy personnel served alongside men of the army throughout the conflict, many of them spending as much time serving on land as they did on their vessels.

The Mexican War served as a training ground for many of the key military players who served in the Civil War, and Rowan, while certainly not as influential as some, was no exception. These experiences no doubt played a role in preparing him for his cooperation with the army during the Civil War. Seeing first hand the way land forces operated, and being in a position where these operations were undoubtedly explained to him in great detail, certainly gave him a fundamental understanding of the army and how best the navy could support it. This understanding served him well in his later roles of

command during the Civil War, and it was recognized by officers such as General Burnside, who praised Rowan for his invaluable service and skill. During the previous war, Rowan had also witnessed how detrimental infighting between the Navy and the Army could be, and this surely contributed to his determination to work well with the army.

Rowan's role in the Civil War was most prominent in the attack on Roanoke Island (and his assault on the Mosquito Fleet in the days after), his command of the Naval forces during the joint attack on New Bern, and his command of the New Ironsides during the siege of Charleston. During the joint operations Rowan particularly distinguished himself, drawing praise from officers from the army and navy alike.

Rowan was rewarded for his faithful service by receiving the thanks of Congress, at the request of Abraham Lincoln, and through his promotion by selection, both to a higher rank and with the selection to command the Asiatic Squadron. On that foreign station, Rowan represented much that his country wished to portray: a staunch leader with a forward-thinking perspective, loyal to his country and devoted to the Navy.

Rowan's family carried on a strong military tradition; his son, Hamilton, joined the army and retired at the rank of Major. He and his wife, Frances, had two sons, Stephen Clegg and Hugh Williamson. Stephen, named for his grandfather, quite fittingly entered the United States Naval Academy in 1899 at the age of 17, and graduated on February 2, 1903, 5th in his class. He served as Commander and Executive Officer of the armored cruiser the *USS Frederick* during World War I, and retired at the rank of Captain. Hugh followed in the footsteps of his father and joined the army, from which he retired as a Brigadier-General. He was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery, in the same plot as

his parents and grandparents. Four US Navy ships have been named in honor of the Rowan family, a torpedo boat and three destroyers.

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APPENDIX
Rowan's Logbook and Nautical Navigation

Sketch of a Cruise in the United States Ship of War "Cyane".
From Valparaiso de Chile to the United States in 1848.

Date	Lat.	Long.	Temp.	Wind	Remarks	Bar. (alt.)
1848 Aug 7	33.6	75.34	75.34	SE	Under way at early daylight - off of coast 7 miles	30.1
" 8	33.6	75.26	75.27	SE	SE to SE - first breeze and cloudy	30.1
" 9	33.27	75.43	75.42	SE	SE to SE - to moderate breeze	30.1
" 10	34.5	75.48	75.42	SE	SE to SE - light breeze and calm between the clouds	30.1
" 11	35	75.13	75.21	SE	SE to SE - moderate pleasant fog	30.1
" 12	37.46	75.47	75.30	SE	SE to SE - to just fog - clearing daily	30.1
" 13	40.57	76.1	75.35	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.78
" 14	44.10	76.4	75.7	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.74
" 15	47.35	76.24	75.48	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.72
" 16	50.50	76.41	75.59	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.70
" 17	54.16	76.37	76.04	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.68
" 18	57.1	76.32	76.45	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.66
" 19	59.55	76.18	76.65	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.64
" 20	57.9	76.6	76.68	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.62
" 21	55.47	76.6	76.47	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.60
" 22	54.48	76.49	76.37	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.58
" 23	53.33	76.32	76.25	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.56
" 24	52.20	76.15	76.1	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.54
" 25	51.4	76.0	76.22	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.52
" 26	49.26	75.48	76.6	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.50
" 27	45.36	75.31	76.20	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.48
" 28	42.37	75.15	76.01	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.46
" 29	40.1	75.6	75.8	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.44
" 30	38.7	75.37	75.17	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.42
" 1	36.37	75.31	75.15	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.40
" 2	34.67	75.18	75.20	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.38
" 3	33.54	75.06	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.36
" 4	32.20	74.54	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.34
" 5	30.57	74.42	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.32
" 6	29.34	74.30	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.30
" 7	28.11	74.18	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.28
" 8	26.88	74.06	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.26
" 9	25.65	73.94	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.24
" 10	24.42	73.82	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.22
" 11	23.19	73.70	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.20
" 12	21.96	73.58	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.18
" 13	20.73	73.46	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.16
" 14	19.50	73.34	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.14
" 15	18.27	73.22	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.12
" 16	17.04	73.10	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.10
" 17	15.81	72.98	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.08
" 18	14.58	72.86	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.06
" 19	13.35	72.74	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.04
" 20	12.12	72.62	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.02
" 21	10.89	72.50	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	29.00
" 22	9.66	72.38	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.98
" 23	8.43	72.26	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.96
" 24	7.20	72.14	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.94
" 25	5.97	72.02	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.92
" 26	4.74	71.90	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.90
" 27	3.51	71.78	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.88
" 28	2.28	71.66	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.86
" 29	1.05	71.54	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.84
" 30	0.00	71.42	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.82
" 1	0.00	71.30	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.80
" 2	0.00	71.18	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.78
" 3	0.00	71.06	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.76
" 4	0.00	70.94	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.74
" 5	0.00	70.82	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.72
" 6	0.00	70.70	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.70
" 7	0.00	70.58	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.68
" 8	0.00	70.46	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.66
" 9	0.00	70.34	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.64
" 10	0.00	70.22	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.62
" 11	0.00	70.10	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.60
" 12	0.00	69.98	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.58
" 13	0.00	69.86	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.56
" 14	0.00	69.74	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.54
" 15	0.00	69.62	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.52
" 16	0.00	69.50	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.50
" 17	0.00	69.38	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.48
" 18	0.00	69.26	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.46
" 19	0.00	69.14	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.44
" 20	0.00	69.02	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.42
" 21	0.00	68.90	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.40
" 22	0.00	68.78	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.38
" 23	0.00	68.66	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.36
" 24	0.00	68.54	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.34
" 25	0.00	68.42	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.32
" 26	0.00	68.30	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.30
" 27	0.00	68.18	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.28
" 28	0.00	68.06	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.26
" 29	0.00	67.94	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.24
" 30	0.00	67.82	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.22
" 1	0.00	67.70	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.20
" 2	0.00	67.58	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.18
" 3	0.00	67.46	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.16
" 4	0.00	67.34	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.14
" 5	0.00	67.22	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.12
" 6	0.00	67.10	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.10
" 7	0.00	66.98	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.08
" 8	0.00	66.86	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.06
" 9	0.00	66.74	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.04
" 10	0.00	66.62	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.02
" 11	0.00	66.50	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	28.00
" 12	0.00	66.38	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.98
" 13	0.00	66.26	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.96
" 14	0.00	66.14	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.94
" 15	0.00	66.02	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.92
" 16	0.00	65.90	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.90
" 17	0.00	65.78	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.88
" 18	0.00	65.66	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.86
" 19	0.00	65.54	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.84
" 20	0.00	65.42	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.82
" 21	0.00	65.30	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.80
" 22	0.00	65.18	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.78
" 23	0.00	65.06	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.76
" 24	0.00	64.94	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.74
" 25	0.00	64.82	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.72
" 26	0.00	64.70	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.70
" 27	0.00	64.58	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.68
" 28	0.00	64.46	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.66
" 29	0.00	64.34	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.64
" 30	0.00	64.22	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.62
" 1	0.00	64.10	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.60
" 2	0.00	63.98	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.58
" 3	0.00	63.86	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.56
" 4	0.00	63.74	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.54
" 5	0.00	63.62	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.52
" 6	0.00	63.50	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.50
" 7	0.00	63.38	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.48
" 8	0.00	63.26	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.46
" 9	0.00	63.14	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.44
" 10	0.00	63.02	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.42
" 11	0.00	62.90	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.40
" 12	0.00	62.78	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.38
" 13	0.00	62.66	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.36
" 14	0.00	62.54	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.34
" 15	0.00	62.42	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.32
" 16	0.00	62.30	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.30
" 17	0.00	62.18	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.28
" 18	0.00	62.06	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.26
" 19	0.00	61.94	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.24
" 20	0.00	61.82	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.22
" 21	0.00	61.70	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.20
" 22	0.00	61.58	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.18
" 23	0.00	61.46	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.16
" 24	0.00	61.34	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.14
" 25	0.00	61.22	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.12
" 26	0.00	61.10	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.10
" 27	0.00	60.98	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.08
" 28	0.00	60.86	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.06
" 29	0.00	60.74	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.04
" 30	0.00	60.62	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.02
" 1	0.00	60.50	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	27.00
" 2	0.00	60.38	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	26.98
" 3	0.00	60.26	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	26.96
" 4	0.00	60.14	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	26.94
" 5	0.00	60.02	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	26.92
" 6	0.00	59.90	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	26.90
" 7	0.00	59.78	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	26.88
" 8	0.00	59.66	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	26.86
" 9	0.00	59.54	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	26.84
" 10	0.00	59.42	75.21	SE	SE to SE - first light breeze	26.82
" 11	0.00	59.30	75.			

currents, along with any other relevant information. The column on the far right lists the barometric pressure. He kept similar records for several of his other cruises, occasionally including other information, but he always included the date, the latitude, and the longitude.

Determining the date and the temperature were easy enough; latitude and longitude were a little trickier. At sea, latitude and longitude could be determined with the use of a sextant and a chronometer.

The sextant was a device used to measure the angle between two visible objects. These instruments were very sensitive and had to be aligned very carefully. Any error made by an improperly positioned mirror was automatically doubled in magnitude, due to the fact that it utilized two mirrors. For navigational purposes, it was used to measure the angle between a celestial body, such as Polaris or the sun, and the visible horizon. This angle is directly related to the celestial body's geographic location—the point on the earth's surface that it is directly over. Knowing the angle and the time it was measured, one can calculate a position line on a nautical chart. A sextant could also be used to sight the sun at solar noon, and this reading, along with a similar measurement of Polaris, could be used to find one's latitude (this, of course, only worked in the Northern Hemisphere; other navigational stars could be used elsewhere). Polaris was used most frequently, when available, because it is always within one degree of the celestial north pole, making calculations much easier.

Once the latitude was known, it could be used, along with a chronometer, to determine the longitude. A chronometer was a clock which kept the time of a specific place at a specific location, the longitude of which was known. Vessels sailing from

Washington set their chronometers to the time kept by the Naval Observatory. The United States Naval Observatory was created in 1830, and was used as a base for navigational tools such as charts and instruments. It also made the astronomical observations necessary to properly rate and set the Navy's chronometers.

Knowing that the earth rotates at 360 degrees a day, and that the sun therefore appears to move through 15 degrees each hour (one degree every four minutes), one can compare the time the sun reaches its zenith at the present location (local noon) with the time on the chronometer, and mathematically derive the longitude of the vessel. Accuracy of this method varies, due to the elliptical shape of the Earth's orbit of the sun, making the sun appear to move slower or faster depending on the time of the year. This can be taken into consideration through the use of a nautical almanac, and calculated into the results for a much more accurate result. A nautical almanac has been published annually in Great Britain since 1767; the US Naval Observatory published its first nautical almanac in 1852.

It was through records like these that sailors learned of currents and weather patterns, hazards that should be avoided, and the best routes to travel at certain times of the year. This information could also be used to update charts and maps, if a vessel discovered something that was not included in the data already known. This information was compiled at the Naval Observatory, and could be passed on to vessels making future trips, making their voyage easier and less risky.